1
VOLUME

SHINICHIROU NARIIE PRESENTS

ORIGINAL STORY TAKUMI HIIRAGIBOSHI

CHARACTER DESIGN YOU ASABA

ABSOLUTE DUO
アブソリュート・デュオ

WHAT...
WHAT HAPPENED...?
ANSWER ME!!
"WHAT HAPPENED?"
WELL...
THEY WERE WEAK...
SO THEY DIED.
FWOOOO

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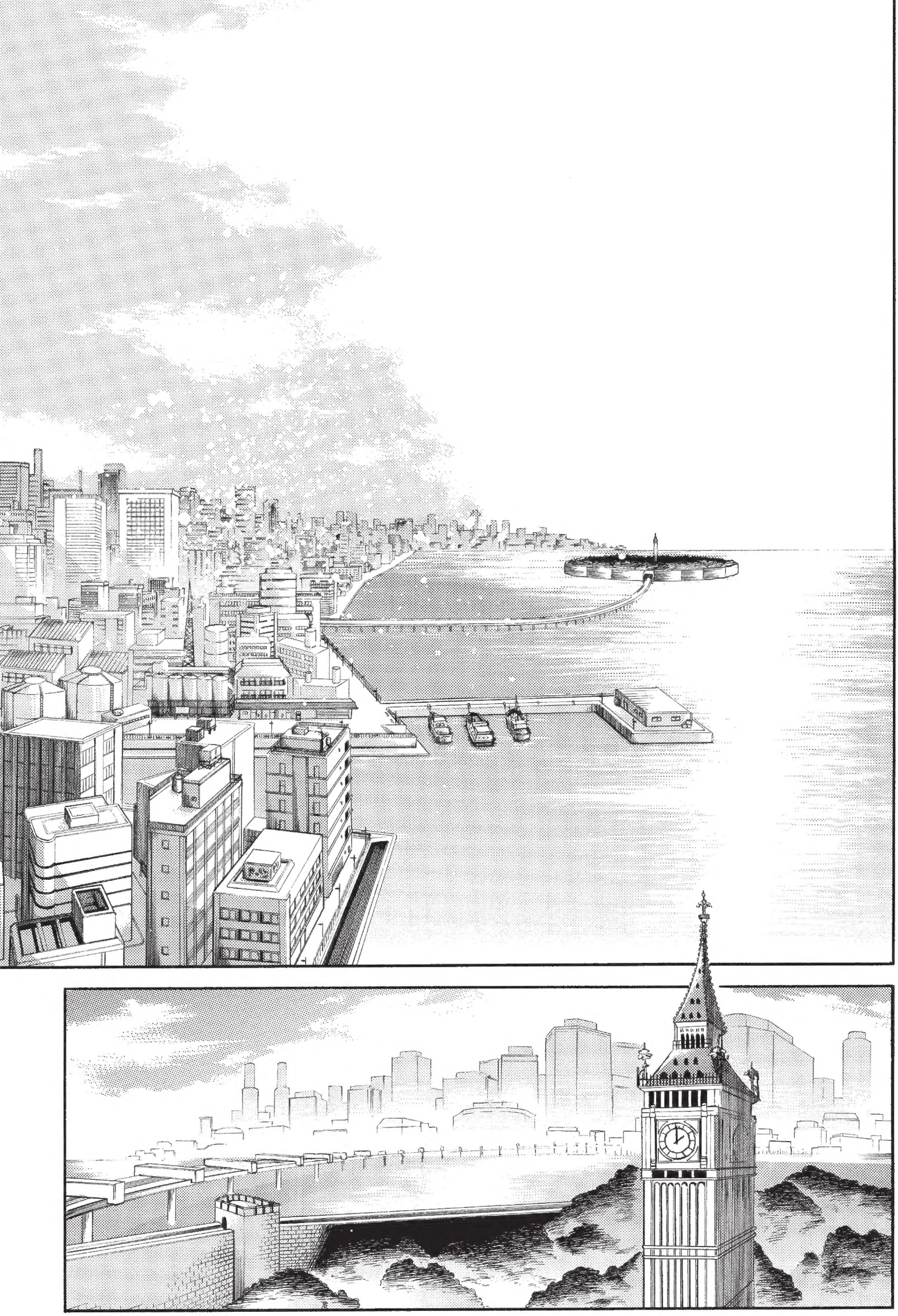
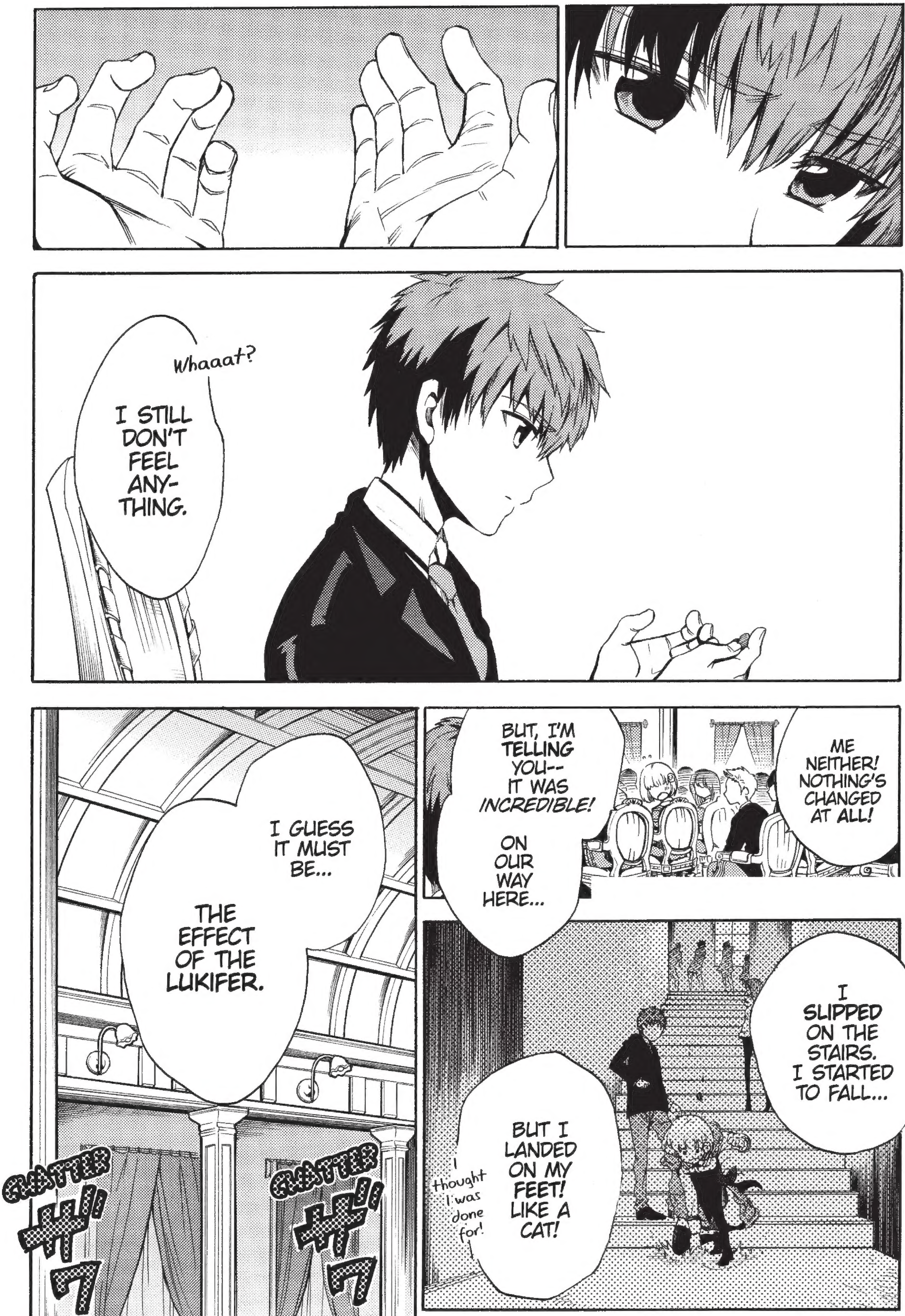
Shinichirou Nariie
Original Story: Takumi Hiiragiboshi
Character Design: You Asaba

Chapter 1: With This Shield—I



KOR
ACAD
OPEN
CEREMO

CHATTER ザワ
CHATTER ザワ
CHATTER... ザワ
...


Whaaat?
I STILL DON'T FEEL ANYTHING.
ME NEITHER! NOTHING'S CHANGED AT ALL!
BUT, I'M TELLING YOU-- IT WAS *INCREDIBLE!*
ON OUR WAY HERE...
I SLIPPED ON THE STAIRS. I STARTED TO FALL...
BUT I LANDED ON MY FEET! LIKE A CAT!
I thought I was done for!
I GUESS IT MUST BE...
THE EFFECT OF THE LUKIFER.
CHATTER ザワ
CHATTER ザワ

Seri-ously?
I CAN'T SENSE ANY-THING.
IF YOU MOVE YOUR BODY...
YOU'LL UNDER-STAND WHAT ITS POWER FEELS LIKE!
CHATTER
......
CHATTER...
POWER, HUH?
DID I REALLY...
RECEIVE ANY...?
JUST FROM...
THAT RITE?

Hush...
HN...?
Klok...
HUH?
WHAT'S GOING ON?

CHING
チリン…

KLOK
KLOK

WHOA.
SHE LOOKS JUST LIKE A DOLL.
KLOK
SHE DEFINITELY...
KLOK
ISN'T JAPANESE.
Fwissh...
shf...
Murmur
ザワ
WOW! SHE'S GORGEOUS!
Murmur
ザワ
SHE'S SO CUTE!
SHE'S ITTY-BITTY.
DID YOU SEE THAT? HER SKIN'S LIKE PORCELAIN!
IS SHE OUR AGE?
Murmur
ザワ

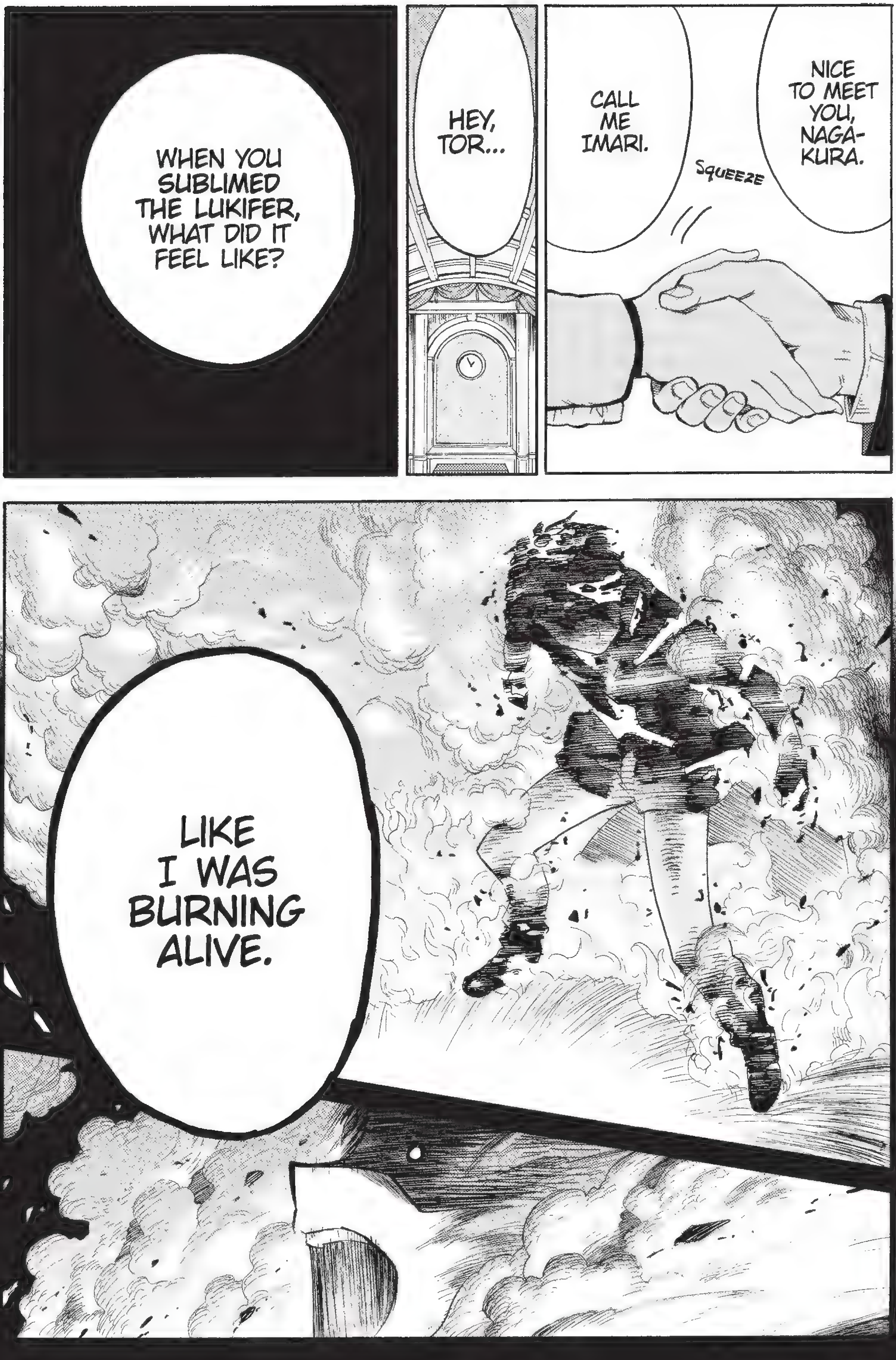
PERK
SHE'S THE VERY DEFINITION OF A "PRETTY YOUNG THING," ISN'T SHE?
Sigh
....
HEY...
YOU LISTENING TO ME?
HM? WERE YOU TALKING TO ME?
WHO *ELSE* WOULD I BE TALKING TO?
SORRY.
Heh.
YOU'RE A SURPRISINGLY NORMAL PERSON TO TALK TO.
WHAT?
WELL, UP TILL *NOW*, YOU'VE HAD A FROWN ON YOUR FACE.

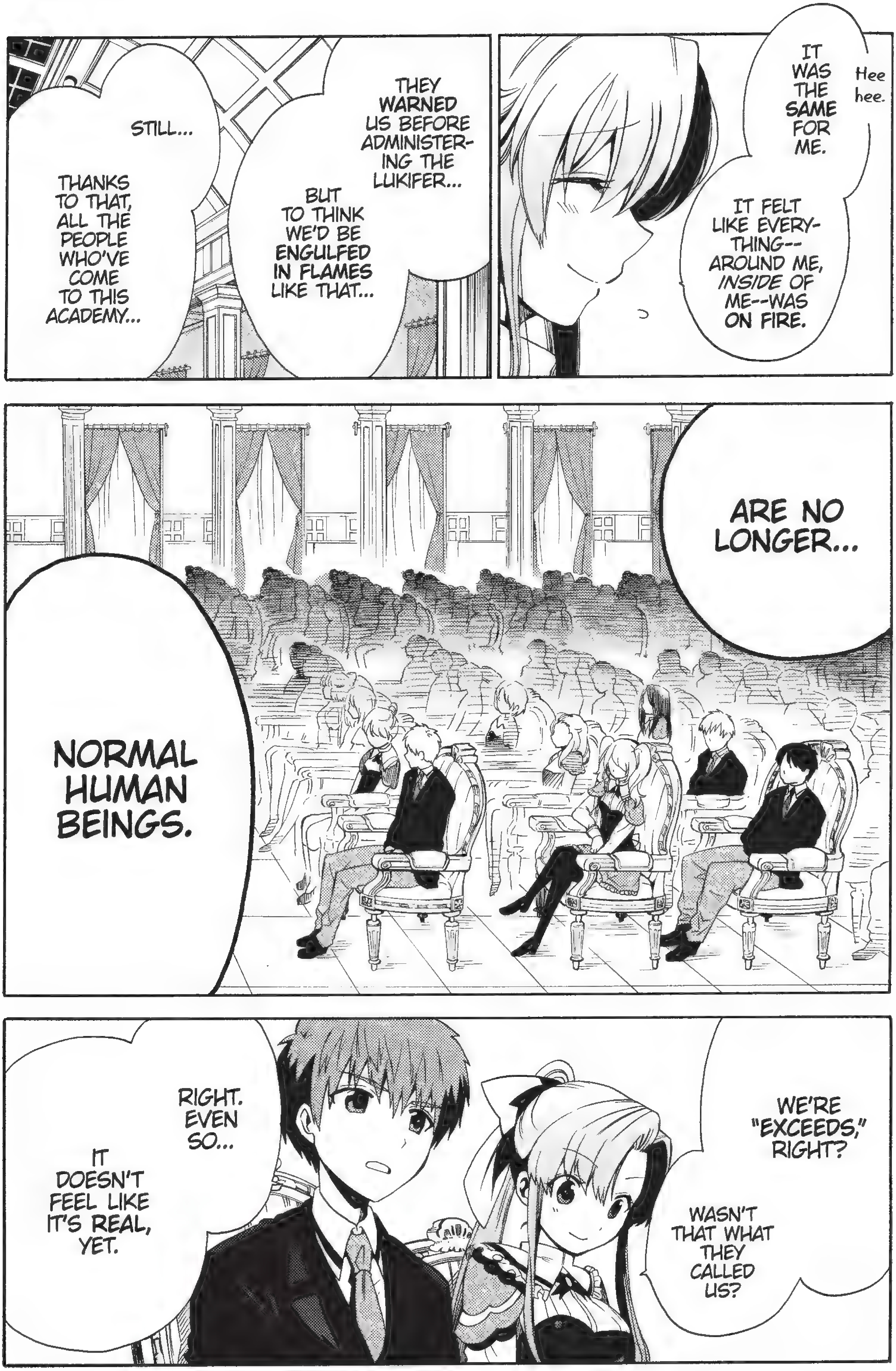
AH... SORRY.
I WAS JUST LOST IN THOUGHT.
SO, YOU'RE SAYING THAT NEITHER I *NOR* THAT BEAUTIFUL FOREIGN GIRL ARE A MATCH FOR WHATEVER YOU WERE THINKING ABOUT?
I GUESS THAT'S WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE...
Ha ha...
HEY, YOU DON'T HAVE TO PRETEND YOU WEREN'T ENTRANCED BY HER. I UNDERSTAND.
A GIRL THAT PRETTY WOULD CATCH ANYONE'S EYE.
BUT...
I WONDER WHY SHE'D DELIBERATELY ENROLL IN AN *UNUSUAL* SCHOOL LIKE THIS...
CONSIDERING WE'RE ALL HERE...
TO STUDY COMBAT TECHNIQUES.

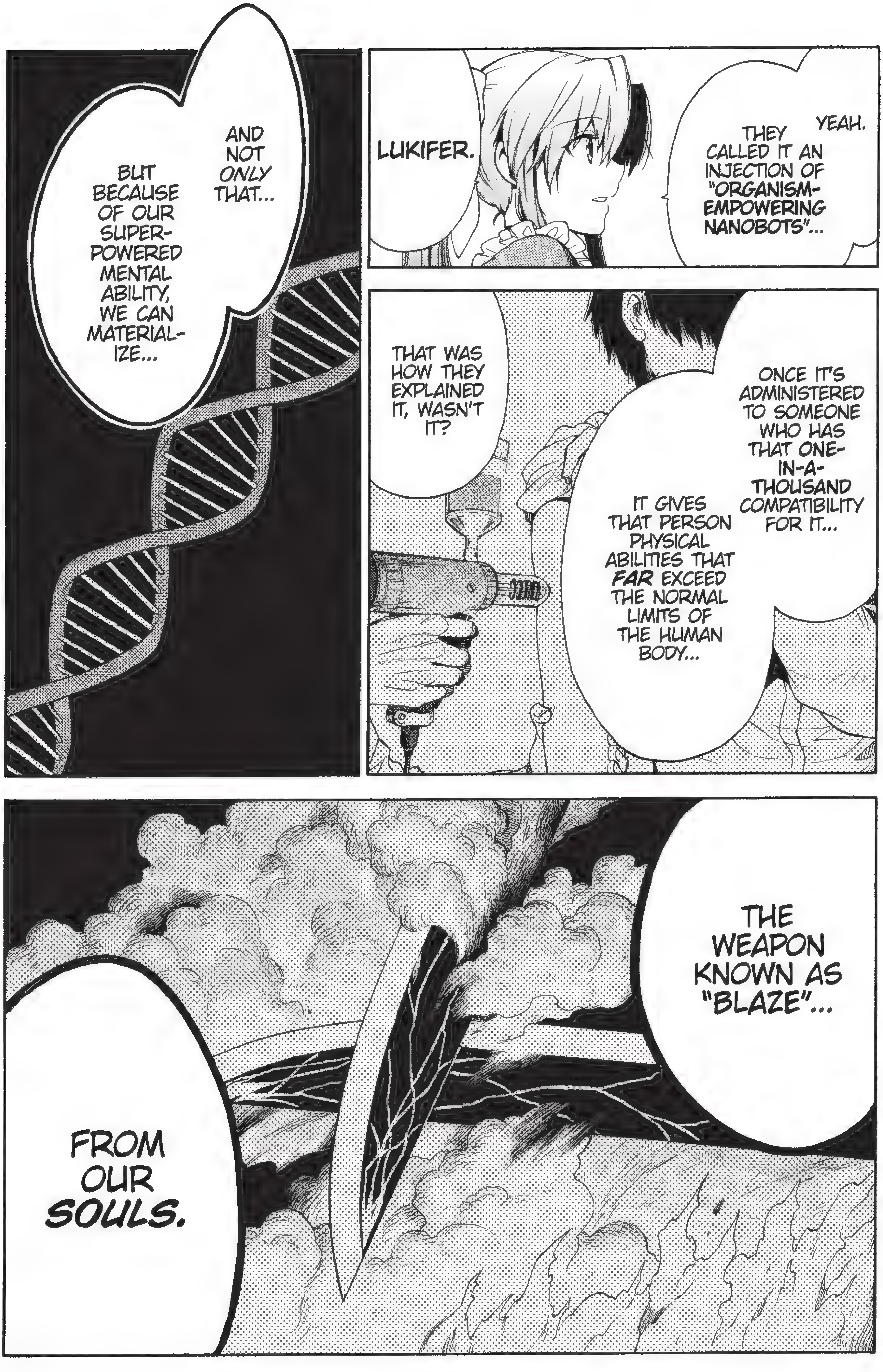
IT IS ODD.
SHE MUST HAVE A GOOD REASON FOR COMING HERE.
SHE'S SO CUTE. IT WOULD BE A SHAME FOR HER TO MAR THAT PRETTY FACE IN BATTLE.
THAT SILVER HAIR AND SNOW-WHITE SKIN...
PETITE, WITH LOVELY FEATURES...
SIGH... I ENVY HER.
DON'T SELL YOURSELF SHORT. YOU'RE QUITE LOVELY YOURSELF, YOU KNOW.
You're right, but...
REALLY? HEE HEE! THANK Y--
WAIT, WHAT?!
WH-WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SAY?!
UM, I WAS JUST TELLING YOU WHAT I THOUGHT...!

CLATTER
E-EVEN IF YOU'RE *THINKING* IT...
YOU CAN'T JUST BLURT OUT SOMETHING *EMBARRASSING* LIKE THAT!
EXCUSE ME...
MY APOLOGIES, BUT COULD YOU PLEASE KEEP IT DOWN?
OH, S-SORRY!
SORRY ABOUT THAT.
THANK YOU...
I APPRECIATE YOUR COOPERATION.
Sigh...
Ahem.
A-ANYWAY, YOU CAN'T SAY STUFF LIKE THAT SO SUDDENLY TO PEOPLE!
YOU MIGHT GIVE THE WRONG IMPRESSION...
UH... WHAT IS THERE TO MISUNDERSTAND...?

ANY-WAY...
I GUESS WE STARTED OFF A BIT WEIRD.
I SHOULD INTRODUCE MYSELF!
MY NAME IS...
NAGAKURA IMARI.
NICE TO MEET YOU.
I'M...
KOKONOE TOR.

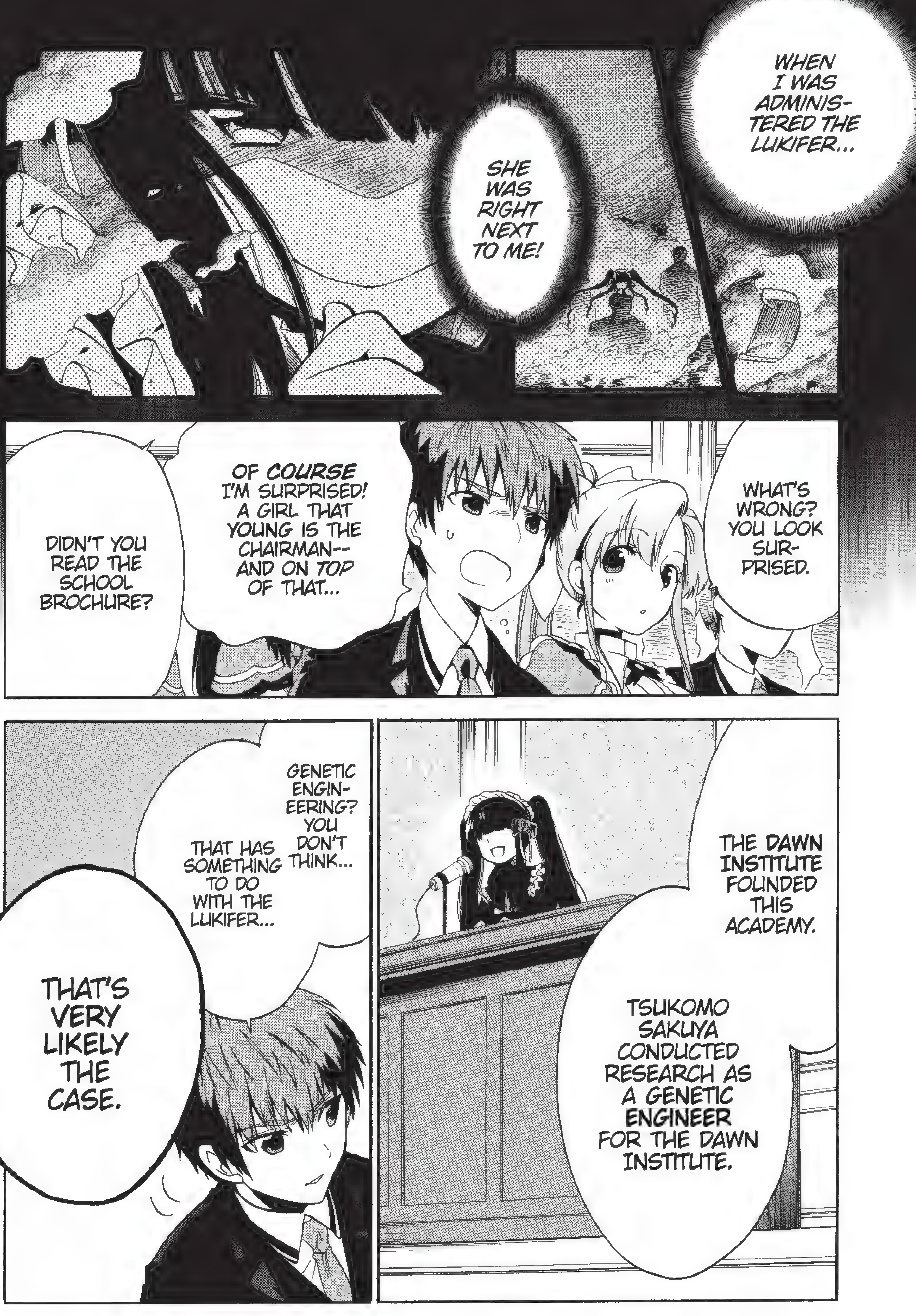

NICE TO MEET YOU, NAGAKURA.
SQUEEZE
CALL ME IMARI.
HEY, TOR...
WHEN YOU SUBLIMED THE LUKIFER, WHAT DID IT FEEL LIKE?
LIKE I WAS BURNING ALIVE.

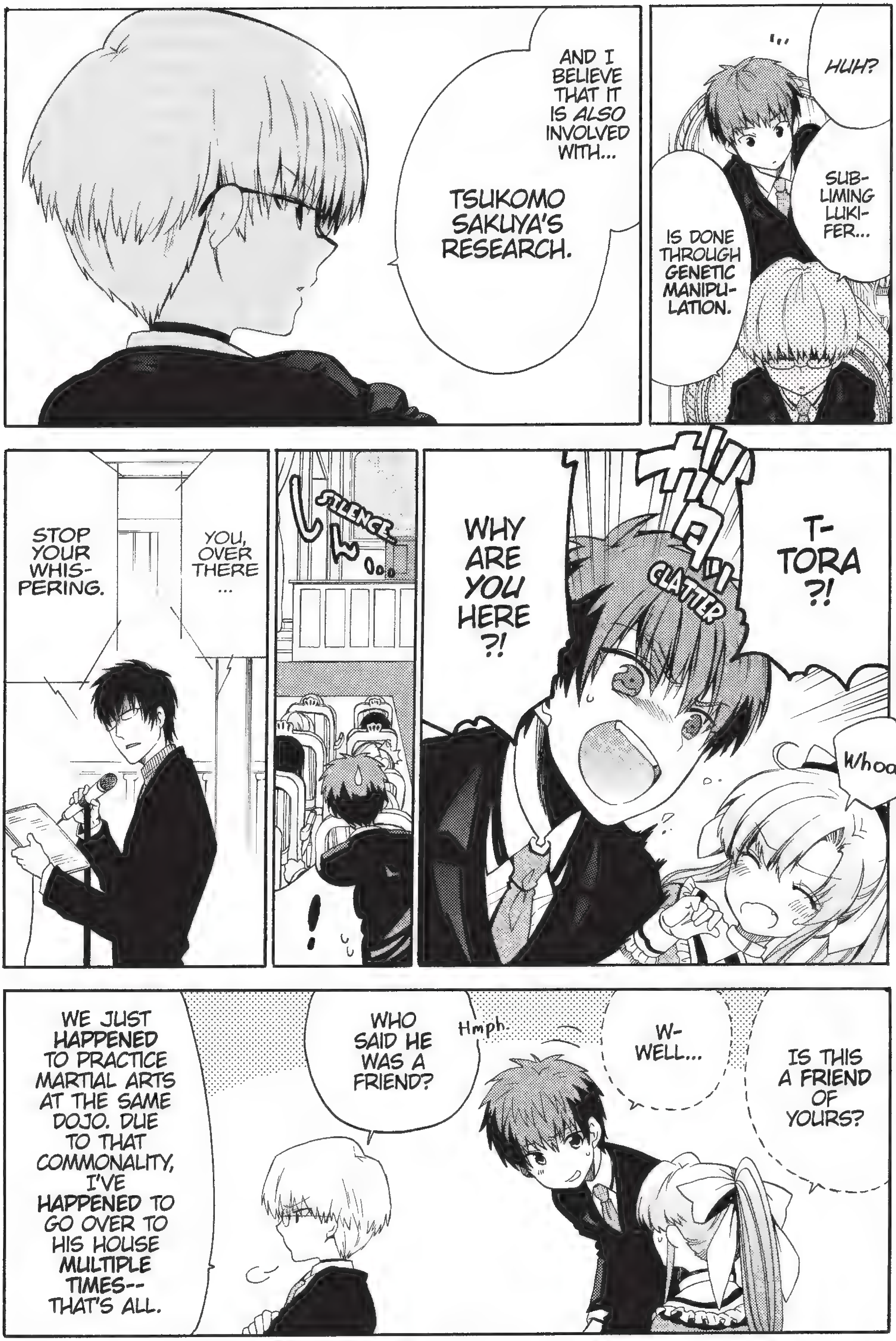

IT WAS THE SAME FOR ME.
Hee hee.
IT FELT LIKE EVERYTHING--AROUND ME, *INSIDE OF* ME--WAS ON FIRE.
THEY WARNED US BEFORE ADMINISTERING THE LUKIFER...
BUT TO THINK WE'D BE ENGULFED IN FLAMES LIKE THAT...
STILL...
THANKS TO THAT, ALL THE PEOPLE WHO'VE COME TO THIS ACADEMY...
ARE NO LONGER...
NORMAL HUMAN BEINGS.
WE'RE "EXCEEDS," RIGHT?
WASN'T THAT WHAT THEY CALLED US?
RIGHT. EVEN SO...
IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE IT'S REAL, YET.

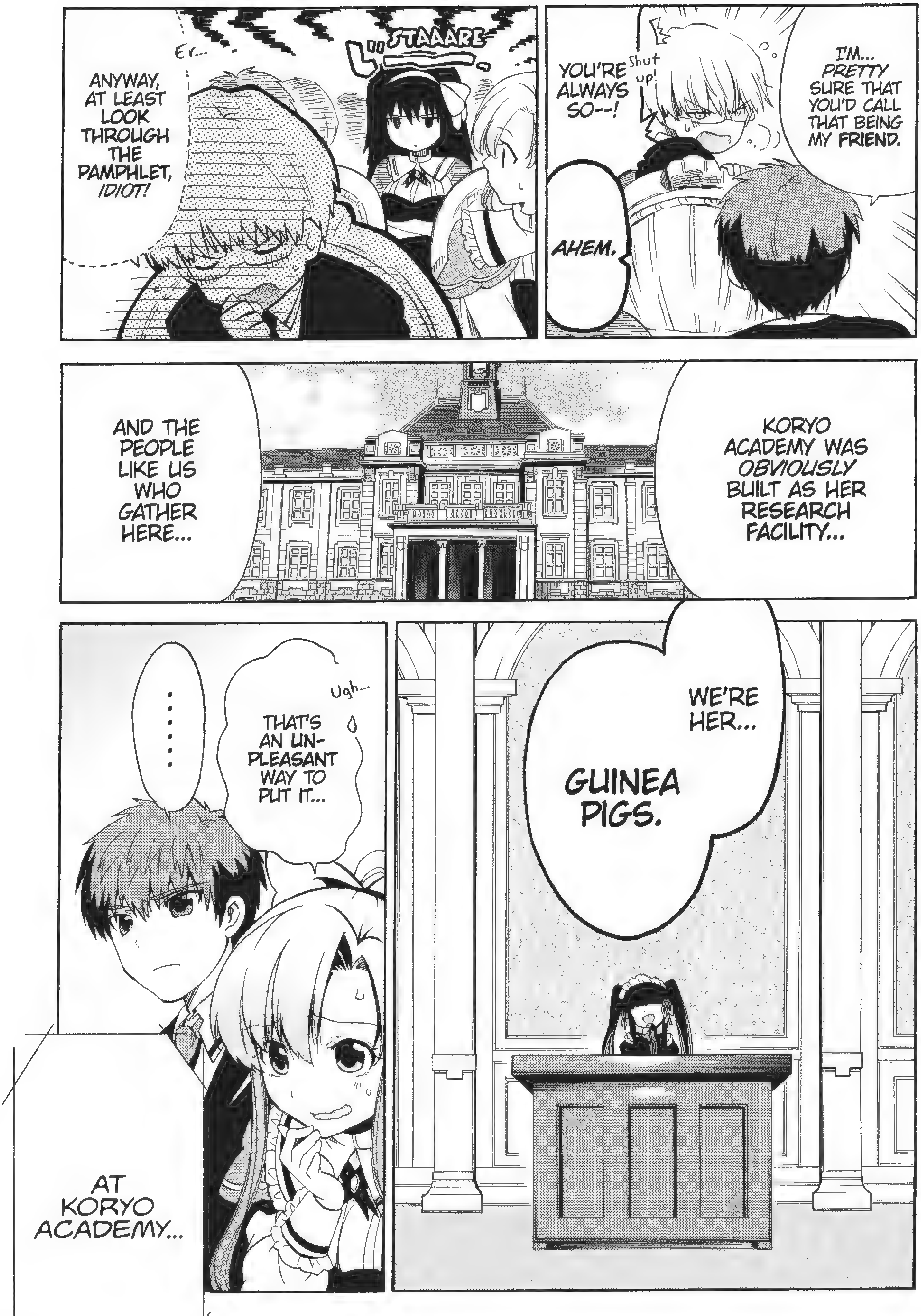

YEAH.
THEY CALLED IT AN INJECTION OF "ORGANISM-EMPOWERING NANOBOTS"...
LUKIFER.
ONCE IT'S ADMINISTERED TO SOMEONE WHO HAS THAT ONE-IN-A-THOUSAND COMPATIBILITY FOR IT...
IT GIVES THAT PERSON PHYSICAL ABILITIES THAT *FAR* EXCEED THE NORMAL LIMITS OF THE HUMAN BODY...
THAT WAS HOW THEY EXPLAINED IT, WASN'T IT?
AND NOT *ONLY* THAT...
BUT BECAUSE OF OUR SUPER-POWERED MENTAL ABILITY, WE CAN MATERIALIZE...
THE WEAPON KNOWN AS "BLAZE"...
FROM OUR *SOULS.*

WHAT KIND OF WEAPON DOES YOUR LUKIFER MANIFEST AS, TOR?
JOLT...
I CAN'T TELL HER THAT IT'S NOT A WEAPON...
BY THE WAY, I--
KAISCREEE
Ymph...
EVERYONE, PLEASE BE QUIET.
WE WILL NOW...
BEGIN...
THE KORYO ACADEMY ENTRANCE CEREMONY.
FIRST OF ALL...

THE CHAIRMAN OF THIS ACADEMY WOULD LIKE TO SAY A FEW WORDS.
Tunk...
GOOD MORNING, NEW STUDENTS.
CLONK
WELCOME TO KORYO ACADEMY.
I AM THE SCHOOL CHAIRMAN...
TSUKUMO SAKUYA.
THAT GIRL...!


WHEN I WAS ADMINISTERED THE LUKIFER...
SHE WAS RIGHT NEXT TO ME!
WHAT'S WRONG? YOU LOOK SURPRISED.
OF *COURSE* I'M SURPRISED! A GIRL THAT YOUNG IS THE CHAIRMAN-- AND ON *TOP* OF THAT...
DIDN'T YOU READ THE SCHOOL BROCHURE?
THE DAWN INSTITUTE FOUNDED THIS ACADEMY.
TSUKOMO SAKUYA CONDUCTED RESEARCH AS A GENETIC **ENGINEER** FOR THE DAWN INSTITUTE.
GENETIC ENGINEERING? YOU DON'T THINK...
THAT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE LUKIFER...
THAT'S VERY LIKELY THE CASE.


HUH?
SUB-LIMING LUKIFER...
IS DONE THROUGH GENETIC MANIPULATION.
AND I BELIEVE THAT IT IS *ALSO* INVOLVED WITH...
TSUKOMO SAKUYA'S RESEARCH.
T-TORA?!
WHY ARE *YOU* HERE?!
CLATTER
Whoa!
SILENCE...
YOU, OVER THERE...
STOP YOUR WHISPERING.
IS THIS A FRIEND OF YOURS?
W-WELL...
Hmph.
WHO SAID HE WAS A FRIEND?
WE JUST HAPPENED TO PRACTICE MARTIAL ARTS AT THE SAME DOJO. DUE TO THAT COMMONALITY, I'VE HAPPENED TO GO OVER TO HIS HOUSE MULTIPLE TIMES-- THAT'S ALL.


I'M... PRETTY SURE THAT YOU'D CALL THAT BEING MY FRIEND.
YOU'RE ALWAYS SO--!
Shut up!
AHEM.
STAAAARE
Er...
ANYWAY, AT LEAST LOOK THROUGH THE PAMPHLET, IDIOT!
KORYO ACADEMY WAS OBVIOUSLY BUILT AS HER RESEARCH FACILITY...
AND THE PEOPLE LIKE US WHO GATHER HERE...
WE'RE HER...
GUINEA PIGS.
Ugh...
THAT'S AN UNPLEASANT WAY TO PUT IT...
......
AT KORYO ACADEMY...

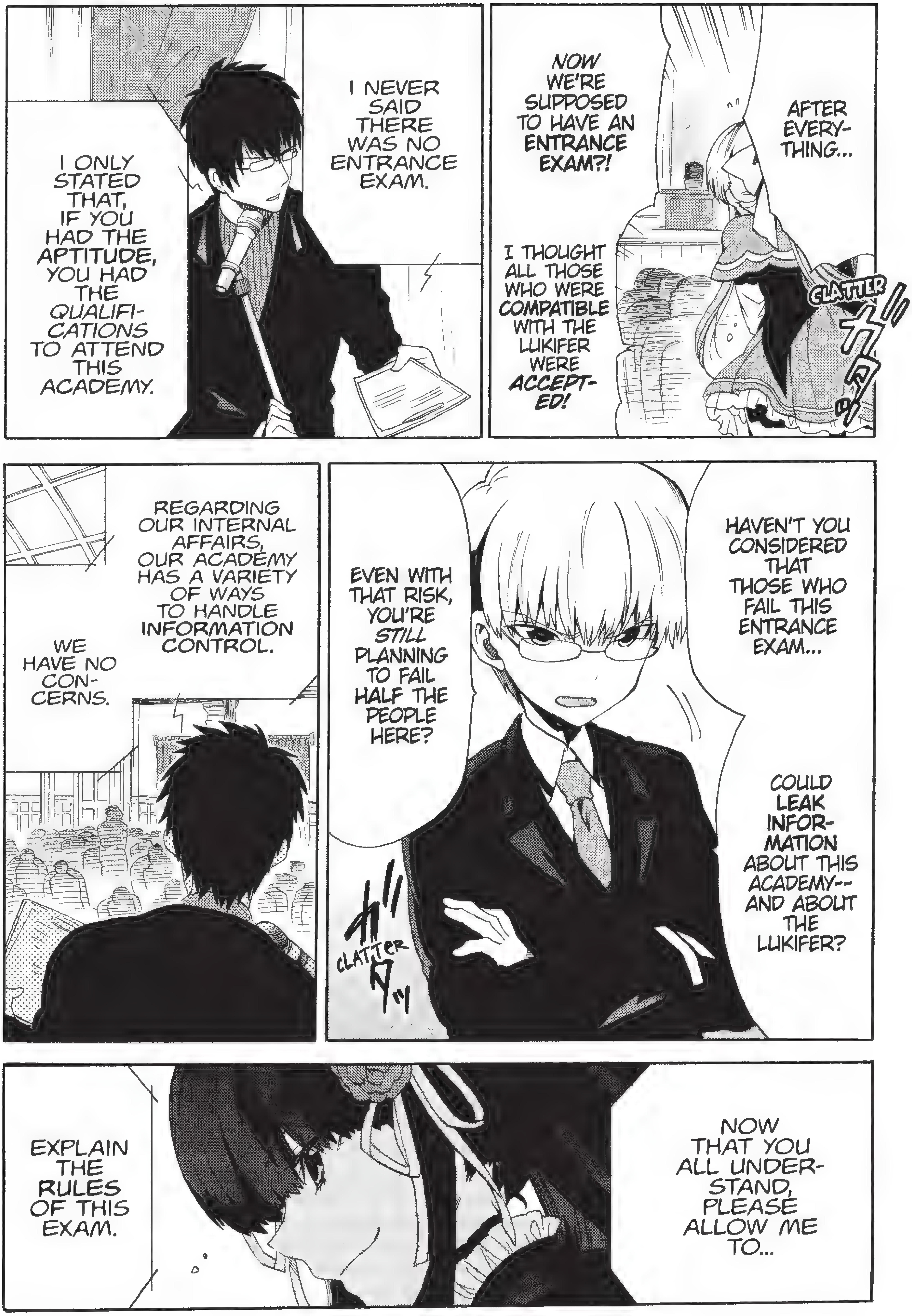
YOU WILL ALL LEARN VARIOUS TECHNIQUES, AND GAIN SPECIALIZED BATTLE KNOWLEDGE.
THIS IS SO THAT YOU MAY ASPIRE TO EVEN GREATER HEIGHTS.
THAT ITSELF IS ONE OF THE PRECEPTS OF THIS ACADEMY--
FOR YOU ALL TO REACH INDIVIDUAL PERFECTION.
AND NOW, FINALLY...
I WOULD LIKE TO SEND YOU OFF WITH THESE WORDS.
RAISE
!
IT IS MY HOPE...
THAT SOMEDAY, EVERY ONE OF YOU...

WHAT'S WRONG, TOR?
AND NOW...
ALL NEW STUDENTS...
ATTAINS ABSOLUTE DUO!
GA
GA
GA
GA

KA-CLANG
KA-CLANG
KA-CLANG
IT'S TIME FOR AN ACADEMY TRADITION.
WE WILL NOW HOLD OUR QUALIFICATION CEREMONY!
DRF
DRF
DRF
DRF
DRF
DRF
DRF
DRF
CHATTER
BARS ON THE WINDOWS?
WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO DO?
PLEASE LOOK TO THE SEAT NEXT TO YOU.
SWISH
THIS PERSON WILL BE YOUR PARTNER.
AFTER I'VE EXPLAINED THE RULES, YOU AND YOUR PARTNER...

WILL BATTLE ONE ANOTHER.
DU-DUN
WHA...?
HUH...?

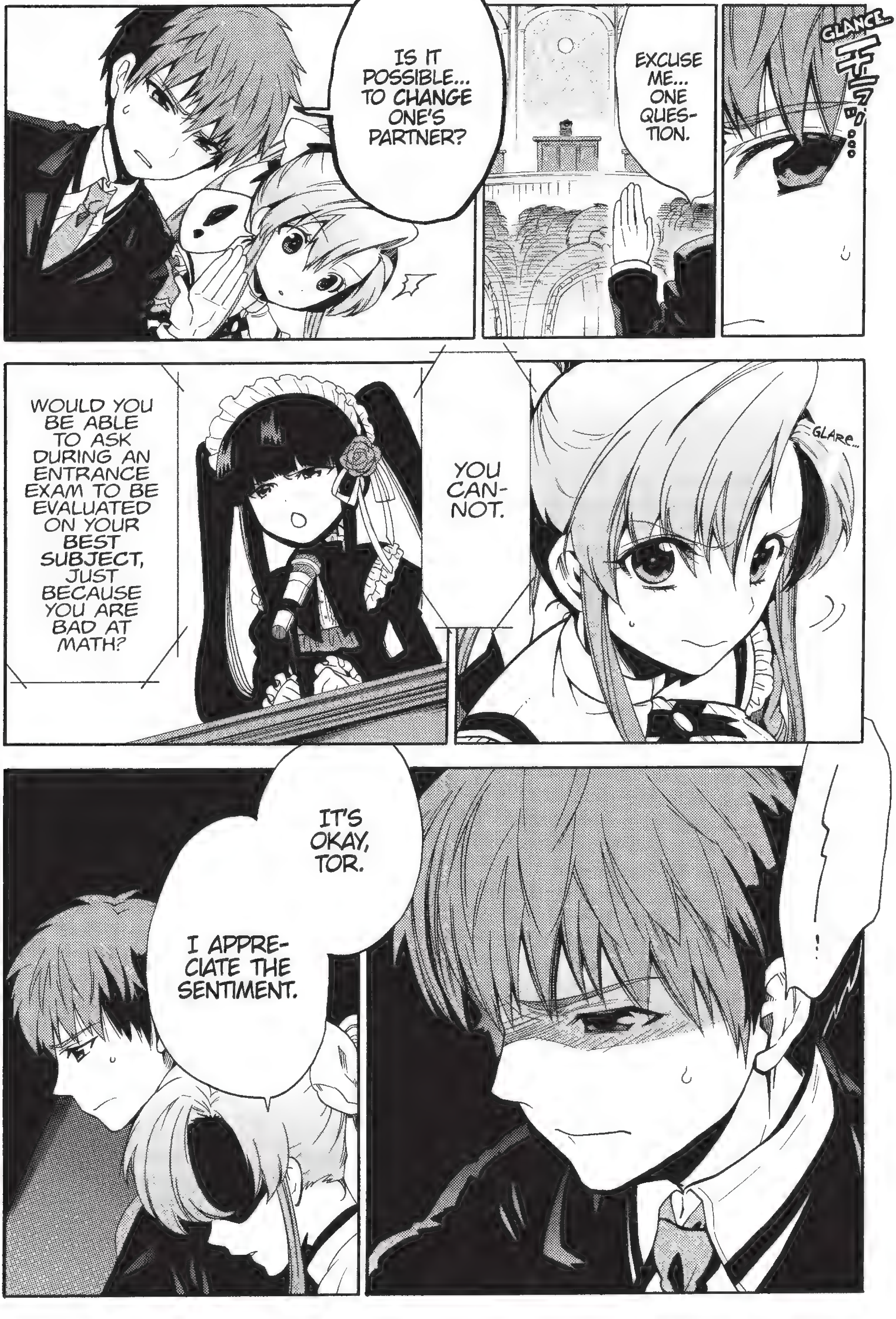
THIS TRADITIONAL EVENT-- THE QUALIFICATION CEREMONY--
IS THE ENTRANCE EXAM FOR YOUR ADMITTANCE INTO KORYO ACADEMY.
CLAMOR
THOSE WHO WIN THEIR DUEL SHALL BE ADMITTED...
AND THE LOSERS SHALL PROMPTLY VACATE THE PREMISES AFTER THEY HAVE THEIR LUKIFER REMOVED.
YOU... YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING, RIGHT?!
THIS EXPLAINS WHY WE WERE ABLE TO ATTEND THE ENTRANCE CEREMONY SO EASILY.


AFTER EVERYTHING...
NOW WE'RE SUPPOSED TO HAVE AN ENTRANCE EXAM?!
I THOUGHT ALL THOSE WHO WERE COMPATIBLE WITH THE LUKIFER WERE ACCEPTED!
CLATTER
I NEVER SAID THERE WAS NO ENTRANCE EXAM.
I ONLY STATED THAT, IF YOU HAD THE APTITUDE, YOU HAD THE QUALIFICATIONS TO ATTEND THIS ACADEMY.
HAVEN'T YOU CONSIDERED THAT THOSE WHO FAIL THIS ENTRANCE EXAM...
COULD LEAK INFORMATION ABOUT THIS ACADEMY--AND ABOUT THE LUKIFER?
EVEN WITH THAT RISK, YOU'RE STILL PLANNING TO FAIL HALF THE PEOPLE HERE?
CLATTER
REGARDING OUR INTERNAL AFFAIRS, OUR ACADEMY HAS A VARIETY OF WAYS TO HANDLE INFORMATION CONTROL.
WE HAVE NO CONCERNS.
NOW THAT YOU ALL UNDERSTAND, PLEASE ALLOW ME TO...
EXPLAIN THE RULES OF THIS EXAM.

IN THIS DUEL, YOU ARE ESSENTIALLY FREE TO DO WHATEVER YOU WANT.
THERE ARE NO RESTRICTIONS ON WHAT WEAPONS YOU CAN USE.
OF COURSE...
WE ALSO ALLOW YOU TO UTILIZE THE MATERIALIZATION OF YOUR SOUL THROUGH LUKIFER--YOUR BLAZE.
IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS DUEL, YOU ARE FREE TO LEAVE.
THE DUEL WILL CONCLUDE WHEN THERE IS EITHER A CONCESSION OF DEFEAT, OR ONE COMBATANT HAS BEEN KNOCKED UNCONSCIOUS.
CHATTER-ザワ ワ
CHATTER ザワ ワ
ALSO, SHOULD A VICTOR FAIL TO EMERGE AFTER TEN MINUTES...
THEN BOTH STUDENTS WILL FAIL.
TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY.
TREAT IT AS YOU WOULD ANY OTHER ENTRANCE EXAM.
IN OTHER WORDS, THE GOAL OF THIS IS TO OVERCOME OTHERS SO YOU YOURSELF CAN SURVIVE.

BUT WHY, THEN?!
WHY DOES IT HAVE TO BE A ***DUEL?!***
THERE WILL ABSOLUTELY BE A TIME...
WHEN YOU WILL BE CALLED ON TO FIGHT.
AS AN EXCEED, AFTER YOU ARE ASSIGNED TO THE DAWN INSTITUTE PEACE-KEEPING CORPS...
THERE WILL BE TIMES WHEN YOU RISK YOUR LIFE IN BATTLE.
THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT A MOMENT WILL COME...
FWOOO
WHEN THE END RESULT WILL BE EVEN MORE SEVERE THAN THE BATTLE YOU ARE ABOUT TO FACE NOW.
IN OTHER WORDS...
THIS ENTRANCE EXAM IS THE VERY FIRST HURDLE...
PRESENTED TO US BY THE ACADEMY...

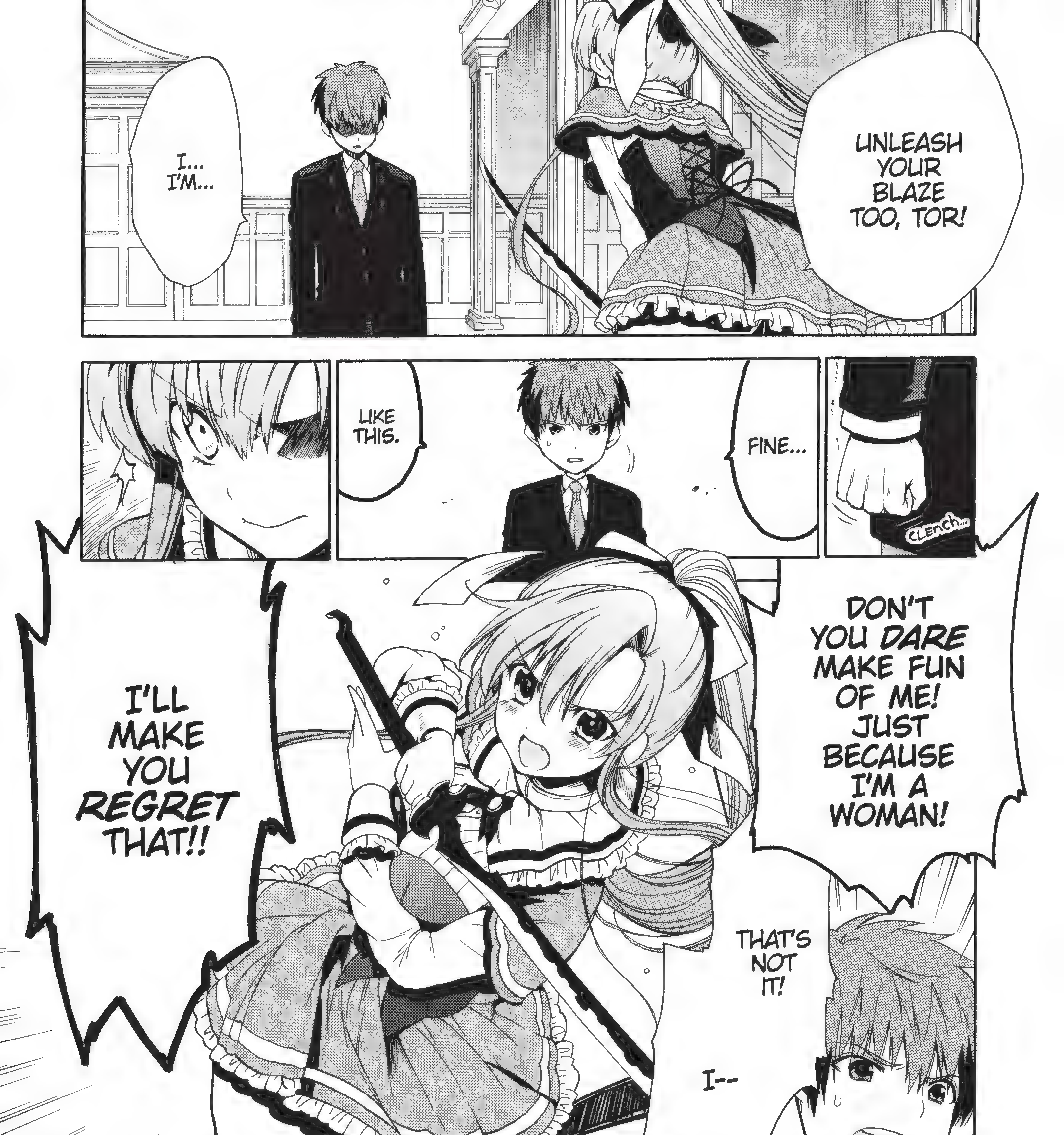
ざわ
MURMUR
ざわ
MUTTER
NOW THEN, BEFORE WE BEGIN...
THERE IS ONE THING ABOUT BLAZE...
THAT I WOULD LIKE TO EXPLAIN.
BLAZE IS A WEAPON CREATED BY THE MATERIALIZATION OF ONE'S SOUL.
THEREFORE, SUCH WEAPONS CAN ONLY DAMAGE ONE'S SOUL.
LISTEN CAREFULLY.
THE ATTACKS FROM A BLAZE WILL ONLY EXHAUST YOUR OPPONENT'S MENTAL STRENGTH.
THEY WILL NOT PHYSICALLY HARM YOUR OPPONENT, OR TAKE THEIR LIFE.
THEY ARE A WEAPON USED FOR SUPPRESSION.
I-IS THAT SO...? IN THAT CASE...
ビクッ
Flinch...


GLANCE
EXCUSE ME... ONE QUESTION.
IS IT POSSIBLE... TO CHANGE ONE'S PARTNER?
GLARE...
YOU CANNOT.
WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO ASK DURING AN ENTRANCE EXAM TO BE EVALUATED ON YOUR BEST SUBJECT, JUST BECAUSE YOU ARE BAD AT MATH?
IT'S OKAY, TOR.
I APPRECIATE THE SENTIMENT.

BUT...
DON'T UNDERESTIMATE ME.
FIGHT, EXCEEDS!
GRASP YOUR FUTURE WITH A FIRM HAND!!
I WILL BE VICTORIOUS!!
THN
THN
THUK
THUK
BAM
GNG
UWWWWWAAAAAAA!!

CLANG
KIIII
KIIII
CLANG
CLASH
KIIIN
I... I HAVE THINGS THAT I NEED TO DO.
AND IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH THEM...
I NEED TO GAIN ACCEPTANCE INTO THIS ACADEMY.
SO, THAT'S WHY...

FLASH
FWAH
I CAN'T YIELD...
GRIP
THIS VICTORY TO ANY-ONE!!
VA-CHAK


UNLEASH YOUR BLAZE TOO, TOR!
I... I'M...
CLENCH...
FINE...
LIKE THIS.
DON'T YOU *DARE* MAKE FUN OF ME! JUST BECAUSE I'M A WOMAN!
I'LL MAKE YOU *REGRET* THAT!!
THAT'S NOT IT!
I--
CHARGE

DASH
SHE'S FAST!
WHUSH
SHOOM
!
BYUUSHK

THIS IS...
AN EXCEED.
TATTER
SURPASSING THE LIMITS OF THE HUMAN BODY...
THOK
BRACE...
THIS IS THE POWER OF LUKIFER...!
SHEEEEN

KIIIN
THWUN

WHEN... DID YOU...
PLEASE.
WILL YOU SURRENDER?
WE... WE'VE JUST MET, AND I DON'T...
I DON'T WANT TO HARM YOU, IMARI.
GLARE
THIS ISN'T A JOKE! I DON'T GIVE UP ON THINGS SO EASILY!
IF YOU WANT TO FORCE ME TO SURRENDER, THEN...

FIGHT ME WITH EVERYTHING YOU'VE GOT, TOR.
Ah!
THAT'S...
WHAT *ETIQUETTE* DICTATES, HERE.

YOU'RE RIGHT.
SORRY.
...CLNCH
IMARI.
FWAAH
COME AT ME...
WITH EVERYTHING YOU HAVE!
DWOOM
UNABLE TO PROTECT...

THE THINGS... THE PEOPLE DEAR TO ME...
I WANTED STRENGTH.
BUT...
IN A STROKE OF IRONY...
MY BLAZE...
THAT...
BLAZE ...!
IT'S...
YOUR BLAZE ...
FROOOOAAAR

ITS ATTACK WILL END ON THIS SHIELD...
FROOOAR
AND I WILL WIN!!
IT ISN'T A WEAPON ?!

KNOWN AS AN "IR-REGULAR"...
HIS IS THE ONLY DEFENSIVE-TYPE BLAZE IN THE WORLD.
HOW VERY...
INTRIGUING.
チリン
CHING

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SHINICHIROU NARIE PRESENTS

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ORIGINAL STORY & ILLUSTRATION
HIIRAGIBOSHI TAKUMI
& ASABA YUU

CHAPTER 01 [END] »»

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«« CHAPTER 02 [START]

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EVER SINCE THAT DAY...
I'VE FOCUSED ON BECOMING STRONGER.
TO DO THAT...

Chapter 2: With This Shield—II

HOW IS THAT EVEN POSSIBLE?!
A BLAZE SHOULD BE A *WEAPON!*
FOR YOURS TO BE A SHIELD...
IMARI.
I'LL GRANT YOUR WISH.
I'LL FIGHT YOU WITH *EVERYTHING* I'VE GOT!
FWOOOOO
Smirk
Glance
WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME LEFT.
TOR...

HOW, EXACTLY...
DO YOU PLAN ON SETTLING THIS?
Krr-shink
BY DESIGN, A SHIELD PROTECTS THE BODY FROM HARM...
WHILE A SWORD INFLICTS WOUNDS.
IF YOU CAN SHATTER MY SHIELD...
THEN YOU'LL WIN.
AND IF I CAN FEND OFF YOUR ATTACK...
THEN *I* WILL WIN!

SOUNDS GOOD.
I WAS HOPING YOU WOULD GET SERIOUS, TOR.
NOW THAT I'VE SEEN YOUR RESOLVE, NO MATTER *WHAT* THE OUTCOME IS...
I WON'T HAVE ANY REGRETS.
A BATTLE BETWEEN SWORD AND SHIELD!
GAAN
I *ACCEPT* YOUR CHALLENGE!

COME AT ME...
DROOSH
WITH EVERYTHING YOU'VE GOT!!

SWRRSH
DWAM

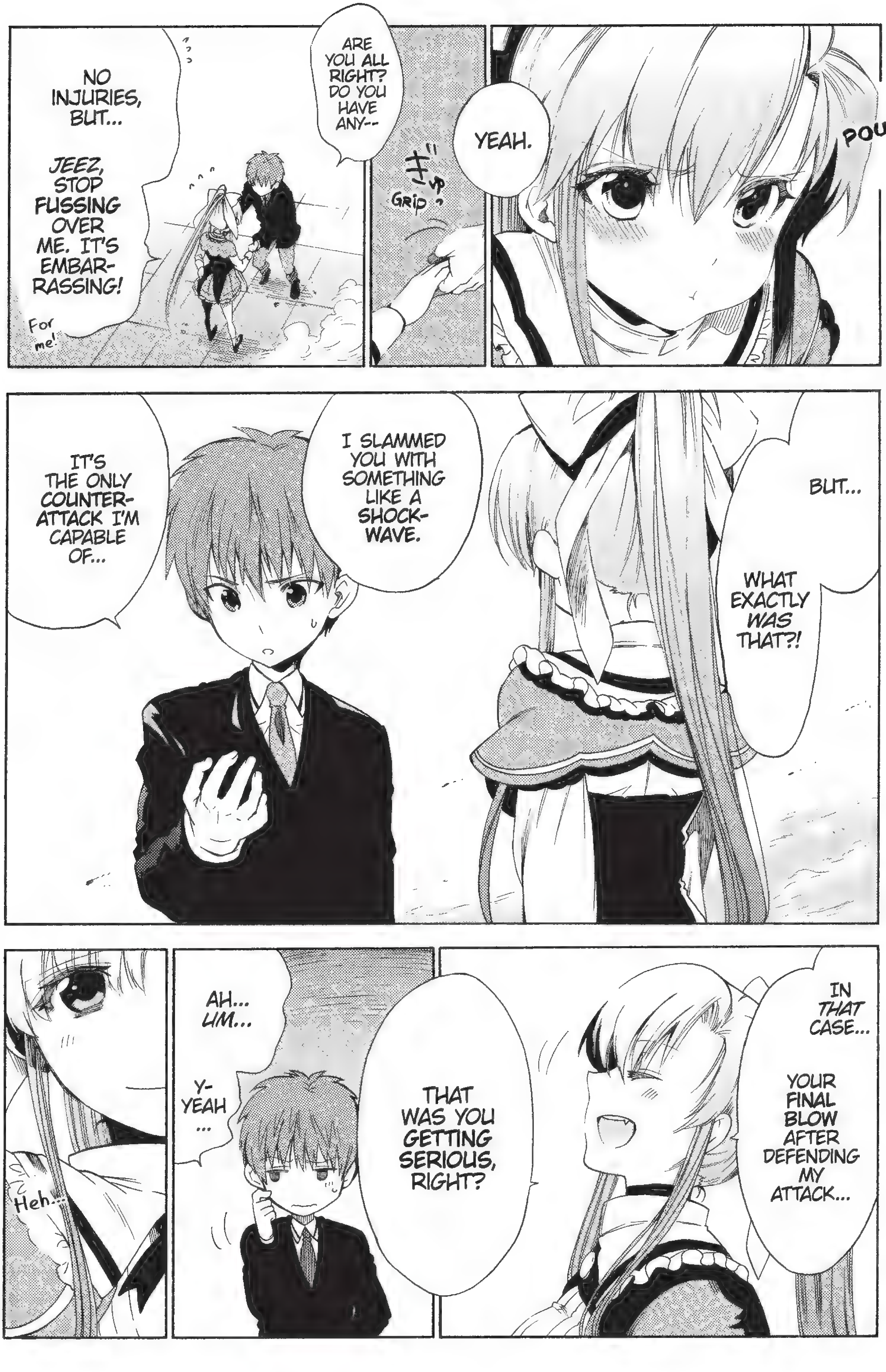
KA-CHINK
CLAAANG

THIS...
IS THE END!
GWUU

FROAAARR

...Klang
SKiid
CRMBL
CRMBL...
CRMBL...
HAAH...
ヒュウウウ...
Shuuuuu
HAAH...

UNH.
TREMBLE...
OW-WW...
ARE...
ARE YOU OKAY, IMARI?!


YEAH.
POUT...
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? DO YOU HAVE ANY--
ぎゅ
Grip
NO INJURIES, BUT...
JEEZ, STOP FUSSING OVER ME. IT'S EMBARRASSING!
For me!
BUT...
WHAT EXACTLY *WAS* THAT?!
I SLAMMED YOU WITH SOMETHING LIKE A SHOCKWAVE.
IT'S THE ONLY COUNTERATTACK I'M CAPABLE OF...
IN *THAT* CASE...
YOUR FINAL BLOW AFTER DEFENDING MY ATTACK...
THAT WAS YOU GETTING SERIOUS, RIGHT?
AH... UM...
Y-YEAH...
Heh...

SHEESH... YOUR BLAZE IS RIDICULOUSLY STRONG.
I TOTALLY LOST.
I'M SORRY, IMARI.
IT'S FINE. JUST BECAUSE I CAN'T BECOME AN EXCEED...
DOESN'T MEAN THAT ALL OTHER PATHS HAVE CLOSED.
I'LL... FIND ANOTHER PATH TO TAKE.
SO ...!!
TURN THAT FROWN UPSIDE DOWN!
SMACK
FLINCH
CONGRATULATIONS, TOR...
ON YOUR ACCEPTANCE INTO KORYO ACADEMY.
THANKS...
IMARI.

ching...
チ
ching...

……
WHAT... IS IT..?
Stare..
KLATA
KLATA
KLATA
KLATA
KLATA
…

KA-DOOON
!!
SHE'S STILL FIGHTING HER DUEL?!
I...
WON...
TWOOF

Fuwaa

whirl
SHUU

……
BEAUTIFUL…!
YEAH…
WHY, YOU …!
DASH
AGAIN AND AGAIN! THIS GIRL'S LIKE A FREAKIN' BIRD!

THE WAY SHE MOVES... WHO *IS* SHE?
YOU'RE STRONG, THAT GIRL'S STRONG...
IT'S LIKE AN *EXCLUSIVE* CLUB FOR ELITES HERE, *HUH...?*
Sigh
SHE WAS STARING...
AT MY ARM?
IF I STAY HERE, I'M JUST GOING TO GET DEPRESSED.
IT'S TIME FOR ME TO GET GOING.
!
LET'S BOTH... DO OUR BEST...
TOR.
IMARI...
IT'S A PROMISE.

INTENSE
?!
I DIDN'T PRACTICE KENDO JUST FOR SHOW, YOU KNOW.
I'M AN EXCELLENT JUDGE OF MY OPPONENTS' STRENGTH.
YOUR SHOCKWAVE JUST NOW...
A SQUARE HIT FROM IT SHOULD HAVE ENOUGH FORCE TO BREAK *AT LEAST* A BONE OR TWO.
DID YOU GO EASY ON ME?
UH...
THAT'S, *UM...*
Giggle!
DIDN'T I TELL YOU TO FIGHT ME PROPERLY?
Jeez...
I'M ASHAMED...

IT'S OKAY.
I'LL LET YOU OFF ON *CREDIT*, JUST THIS ONCE.
CREDIT ...?
Yeah.
THE ***NEXT*** TIME WE MEET...
HMM, LET'S SEE...
HOW ABOUT YOU TREAT ME TO SOME CAKE?

YEAH.
IT'S A DEAL.
NO MATTER WHAT...
I MUST GROW STRONGER.
WELL, THEN...
BYE BYE, TOR.
BOTH FOR IMARI'S SAKE...
AND...

OTO... HA...
ching...
......
TOR...

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CHAPTER 02 [END] »

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CHAPTER 03 [START]

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ORIGINAL STORY & ILLUSTRATION
HIRAGIBOSHI TAKUMI
& ASABA YOU

Chapter 3: I'm Interested in You.

GVVOOOOOAR
KORYO ACADEMY.

LOCATED IN THE NORTHERN PART OF TOKYO BAY...
IT WAS BUILT ON RECLAIMED LAND AND IS ONLY ACCESSIBLE VIA A SUSPENSION MONORAIL.
ITS ENORMOUS WALLS SEEMED CONSTRUCTED TO PREVENT CONTACT FROM THE OUTSIDE.
IT FELT LIKE...
AN ISOLATED LABORATORY.
UGH...

WHAT'S WRONG?
DURING THE EXAM...
I THINK I OVERDID IT.
Ow...
Hmph...
IMMATURE BRAT.
COULDN'T YOU THINK OF A KINDER WAY TO SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS?
YOUR PAIN...IS IT FROM USING THAT ATTACK?
YEAH.
EVEN THOUGH I ONLY THREW ONE PUNCH.

WHY HAVEN'T YOU EVER USED THAT TECHNIQUE WHEN *WE* WERE SPARRING?!
IT'S ONLY RECENTLY THAT I'VE BEEN ABLE TO USE IT.
Were you going easy on me?!
TO THINK...
THAT AFTER BEING ADMINISTERED THE ORGANISM-EMPOWERING NANOBOTS OF LUKIFER...
IT WOULD EVOLVE INTO SUCH A FIERCE TECHNIQUE...
STILL, IT TAKES A PRETTY HEAVY TOLL ON MY BODY.
I DON'T THINK I'D BE ABLE TO USE IT MORE THAN TWICE IN A DAY.
slide...
ガラッ…
HMM.
THE ENTRANCE CEREMONY WAS AN ACTUAL BATTLE...
I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY SENT US STRAIGHT TO HOMEROOM RIGHT AFTER, WITHOUT *ANY* CHANCE TO REST...
chatter
ザワ
chatter
ザワ
Are you okay?
I'm exhausted...
Ow, ow, ow...
chatter
ザワ
THIS ACADEMY IS INSANE.

LOOK.
Scrape...
ガタ
THE MONO-RAIL...
THEY REALLY ARE LEAVING...
I CAN SEE THE PERSON I FOUGHT ON IT.
I WAS HOPING WE'D BECOME FRIENDS, TOO...
IMARI...
RATTLE
ガラッ
?

ching-
チ
…
OH...
HUH?

TOR...
WHA...?
Klok
Klok
Klok

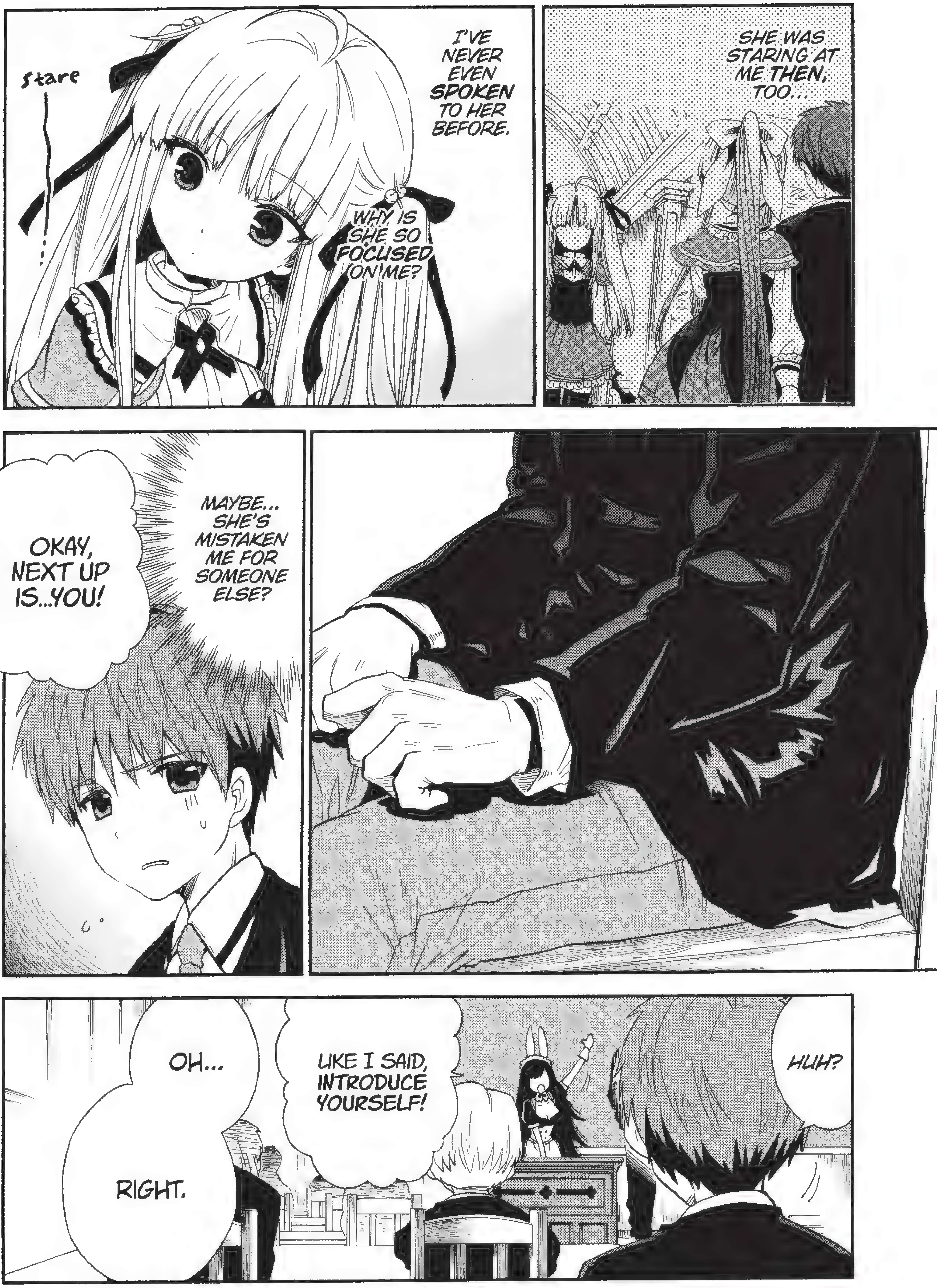
SCOOT
WH...WHY DID SHE CHOOSE THE SEAT NEXT TO ME?!
Peek...
FWP
GLANCE
SHE'S TOTALLY STARING AT ME!

STARE
HEY. IS THIS GIRL...
A FRIEND OF YOURS?
THAT'S MY LINE!
UH...
UM...!
EXCUSE ME...
SHHP!
WHAT IS WITH THIS GIRL?
HELLO, HELLO!
THANKS SO MUCH FOR YOUR HARD WORK DURING THE EXAM! ♡
?!

AND... CONGRATULATIONS ON BEING ACCEPTED INTO THE ACADEMY!
THUNK
POIK
NICE TO MEETCHA! I'M YOUR HOMEROOM TEACHER!
MY NAME IS TSUKIMI RITO! ♡
CALL ME PROFESSOR BUN-BUN, OKAAAY? ♡
ば!!ーーーん
TA-DAAA!!
I GUESS WE SHOULD HAVE SEEN IT COMING...
This is some next-level craziness, here...
EVEN THE TEACHERS HERE ARE INSANE.

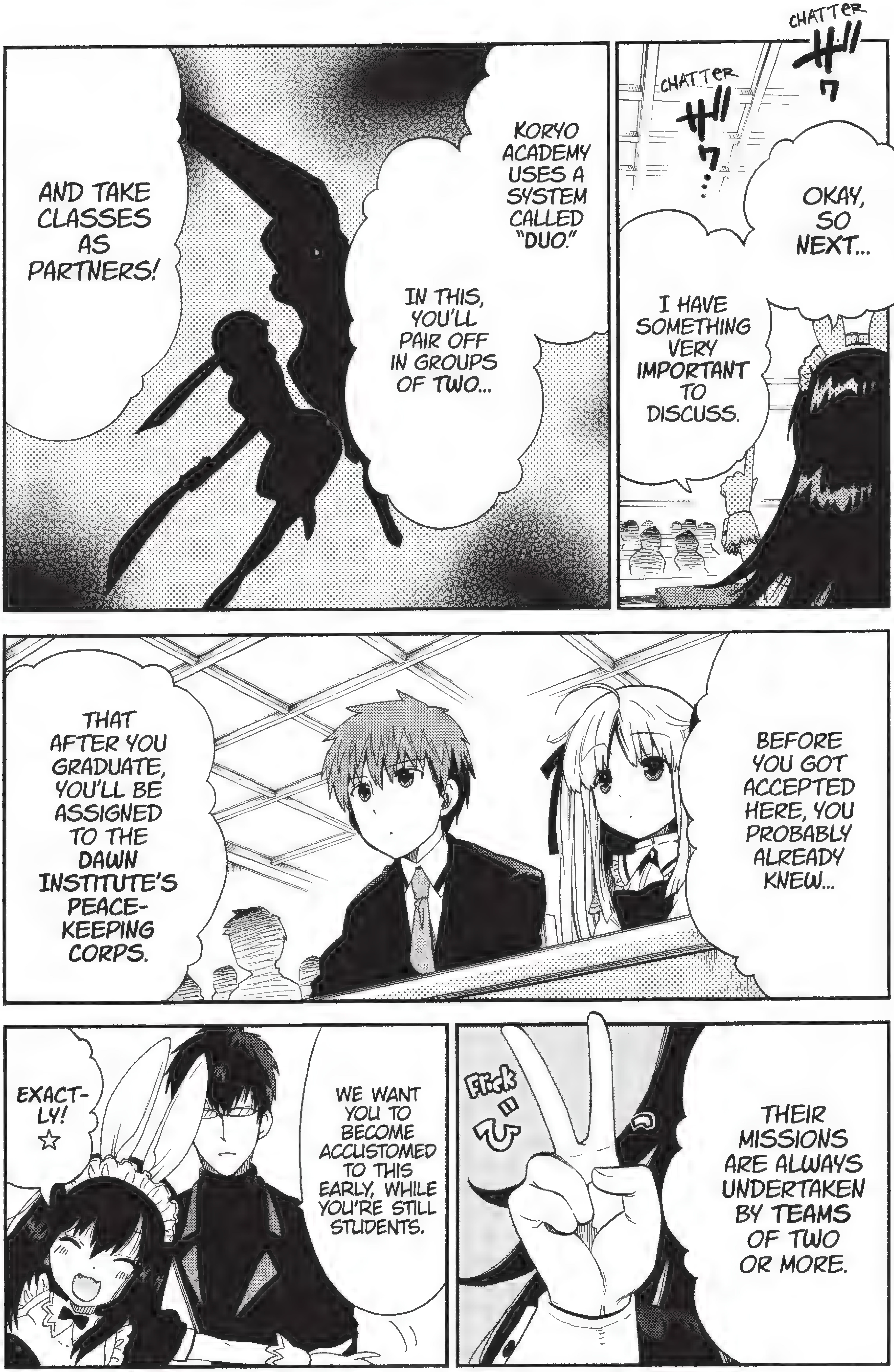
Jeez!
I KNOW I'M CUTE, BUT YOU DON'T NEED TO STARE! YOU'LL HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO GAZE IN ADMIRATION!
of course no one would blame you!
WE'RE NOT STARING, WE'RE JUST IN SHOCK.
TSUKIMI-SENSEI, PLEASE TRY TO TAKE THIS A BIT MORE SERIOUSLY.
EH?
Whaaat?
MIKUNI-SENSEI, HELLO! WHAT'S WRONG?
I'M IN CHARGE OF SUPERVISING THE NEW STUDENTS.
THEY WOULD BE UNEASY IF IT WAS JUST YOU TEACHING THEM.
WHAAAT? WHAT ABOUT ME WOULD MAKE THEM FEEL THAT WAY?!
EVERYTHING.
EVERYTHING...
HE SAID IT!
ANYWAYS, TIME TO BEGIN HOMEROOM!
Let's switch gears!
BEAM

FIRST, PLEASE INTRODUCE YOURSELVES!
SHWIP
STARTING WITH... YOU!
THIS IS BAD...
OKAY.
FOR A WHILE NOW...
THIS GIRL...
HAS BEEN STARING AT ME NONSTOP!
STARE
SERIOUSLY, WHAT IS IT?
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT...
DURING THE EXAM...


SHE WAS STARING AT ME THEN, TOO...
I'VE NEVER EVEN SPOKEN TO HER BEFORE.
Stare
WHY IS SHE SO FOCUSED ON ME?
MAYBE... SHE'S MISTAKEN ME FOR SOMEONE ELSE?
OKAY, NEXT UP IS...YOU!
HUH?
LIKE I SAID, INTRODUCE YOURSELF!
OH...
RIGHT.

MY NAME IS KOKONOE TOR. IT'S NICE TO MEET YOU ALL.
KOKONOE? OHHH, YOU'RE THE ONE EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT!
TALKING ABOUT ...?
THE ENTIRE FACULTY OFFICE WAS ABUZZ!
IT'S SO EXCITING TO HAVE AN IRREGULAR IN THIS YEAR'S ENROLLEES!
ザワ Whisper
HEY, UM... WHAT DOES SHE MEAN BY "IRREGULAR"?
ザワ Whisper
LIKE SUPERHUMAN?
ザワ Whisper
THAT'S THE GUY WHO KNOCKED THAT ONE GIRL OUT!
WAS IT REALLY NECESSARY FOR HER TO ANNOUNCE THAT?!
OKAY, NEXT!
THE CRAZY EYE-CATCHING SILVER-HAIRED CUTIE NEXT TO YOU!
JA.
ching...

MY NAME IS JULIE SIGTUNA.
IT'S NICE TO MEET EVERYONE.
THOUGH IT'S CLEAR SHE'S A FOREIGNER...
HER JAPANESE ISN'T BAD AT ALL.


CHATTER
ザワ
CHATTER
ザワ
OKAY, SO NEXT...
I HAVE SOMETHING VERY IMPORTANT TO DISCUSS.
KORYO ACADEMY USES A SYSTEM CALLED "DUO."
IN THIS, YOU'LL PAIR OFF IN GROUPS OF TWO...
AND TAKE CLASSES AS PARTNERS!
BEFORE YOU GOT ACCEPTED HERE, YOU PROBABLY ALREADY KNEW...
THAT AFTER YOU GRADUATE, YOU'LL BE ASSIGNED TO THE DAWN INSTITUTE'S PEACEKEEPING CORPS.
Flick
THEIR MISSIONS ARE ALWAYS UNDERTAKEN BY TEAMS OF TWO OR MORE.
WE WANT YOU TO BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO THIS EARLY, WHILE YOU'RE STILL STUDENTS.
EXACTLY! ☆

Which is why...★
WE WANT YOU ALL TO FIND AN OFFICIAL PARTNER TO FORM YOUR DUO BY THE END OF THE WEEK!
Go for it!
DUO PARTNER SYSTEM ...?
I GUESS I CAN JUST PAIR UP WITH TORA...
So!
THE REALLY IMPORTANT THING TO KNOW HERE...
WHICH YOU'VE PROBABLY ALREADY GUESSED BY NOW...
Let's deepen! Our relationships!!
IS THAT OUR DORMS HAVE SHARED ROOMS! ♪
AFTER ALL--THE MORE YOU SPEND TIME TOGETHER, THE MORE YOU'LL GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER! ★
TO DEEPEN OUR RELATIONSHIP? WAIT A SECOND...
WHO WILL WE...?
OF COURSE, WE KNOW YOU HAVEN'T HAD A CHANCE TO PICK YOUR DUO YET.
SO THAT'S WHY...

UNTIL THE END OF THIS WEEK...
WE WILL HAVE YOU SHARE A ROOM WITH...
THE PERSON WHO IS SITTING NEXT TO YOU! ♡

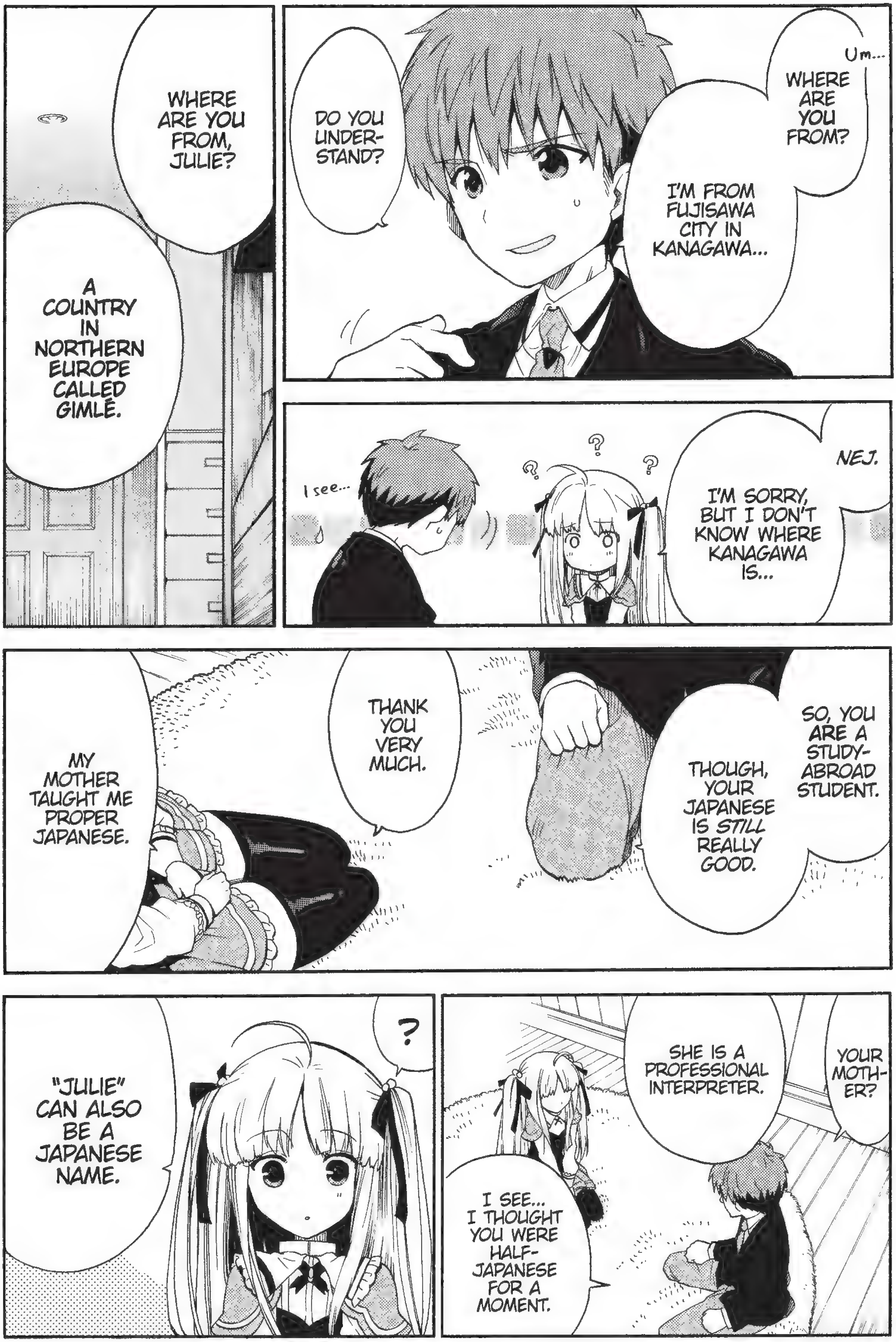
LOOKING AROUND, IT SEEMS LIKE YOU TWO ARE THE ONLY BOY-GIRL PAIR, DOESN'T IT~! ♡
Swoon ~!
BUT, SENSEI!!
THIS IS A SCHOOL REGULATION--SO NO REFUSALS! NOPE, NOPE, NOPE!
CLATTER
YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY BE OKAY WITH HAVING A GUY SHARE A ROOM WITH A GIRL!!
TO CLARIFY~!
JUST SO YOU KNOW, IMPURE FRATERNIZATION WITH THE OPPOSITE SEX WILL RESULT IN YOUR EXPULSION--SO BE CAAAAREFUL, OKAY~?
Are we going... to make a baby?
[redacted] WITH [redacted] AND [redacted] TO MAKE A THIRD ROOMMATE...
cover
cover
cover
LIKE HELL WE WOULD!!

CHATTER
ザワ
Lucky...
Seri-ously?
ザワ
CHATTER
EVEN IF IT *IS* SCHOOL REGULATION...
SHOULDN'T YOU CONSIDER THE SITUATION WITH A LITTLE COMMON SENSE?!
HMM...
COMMON SENSE, EH...?
DO YOU *REALLY* THINK A SCHOOL THAT HOLDS AN ENTRANCE EXAM IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OPENING CEREMONY...
AND NOT ONLY AN EXAM, BUT AN *ACTUAL* BATTLE...
IS NORMAL?
BLANCH...
SLUMP...
TOR...

NICE TO... MEET YOU.
BOW
S...
SAME HERE...
SOME-ONE... ANY-ONE...
PLEASE HELP ME!

SILENCE…
THIS IS SO AWKWARD.
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I SHOULD SAY...
STARE…
UM... FOR NOW... WANT TO SIT DOWN?
JA.

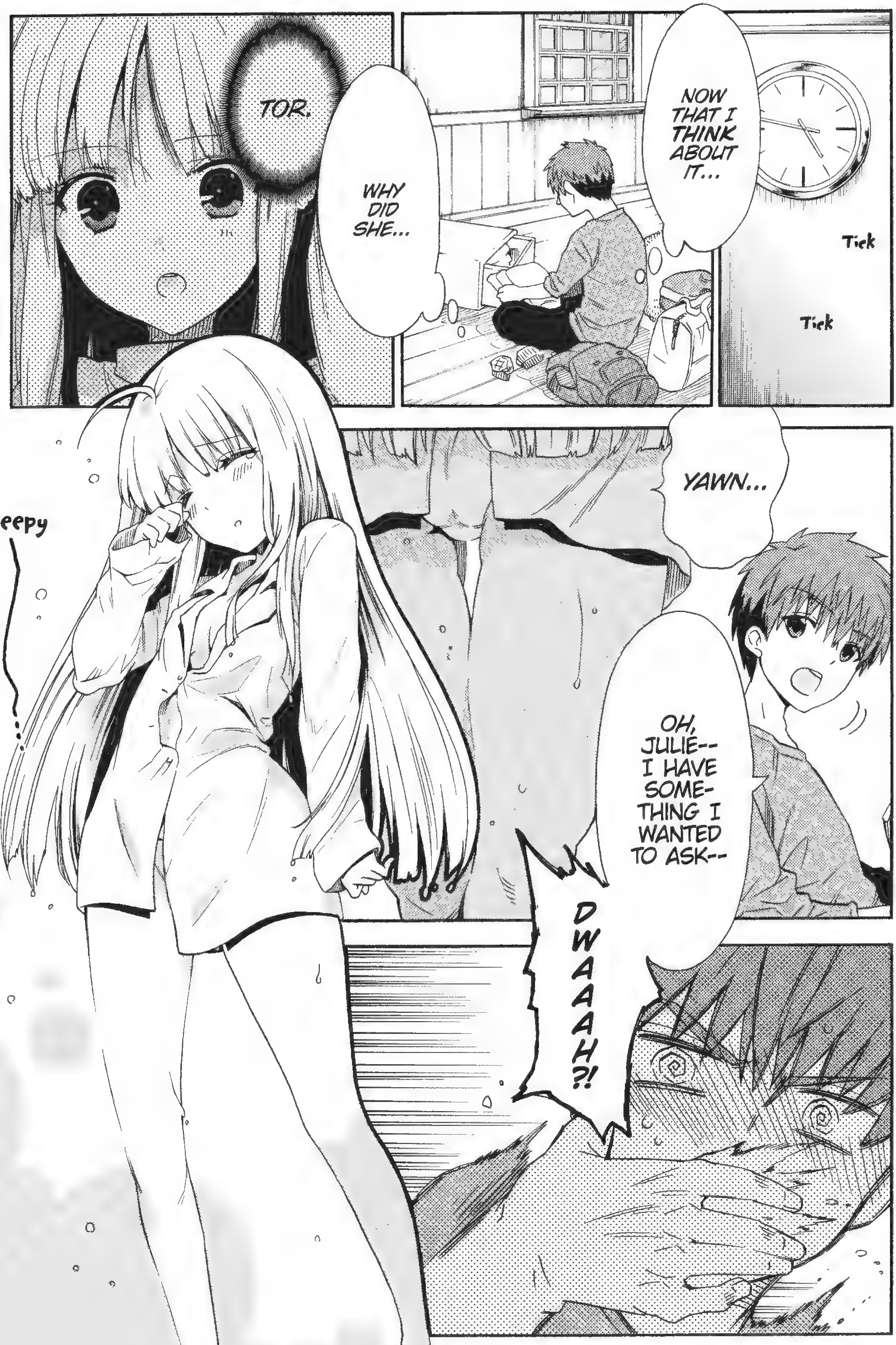
ちょこん
SIT
UM... C-CAN I CALL YOU JULIE?
SO TINY...
JA.
TOR...
TOR...
YEAH?
THAT'S RIGHT... PLEASE JUST CALL ME WHATEVER'S EASIEST FOR YOU.
Silence...
SHE JUST STOPPED TALKING!


Um...
WHERE ARE YOU FROM?
I'M FROM FUJISAWA CITY IN KANAGAWA...
DO YOU UNDERSTAND?
NEJ.
I'M SORRY, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE KANAGAWA IS...
I see...
WHERE ARE YOU FROM, JULIE?
A COUNTRY IN NORTHERN EUROPE CALLED GIMLÉ.
SO, YOU ARE A STUDY-ABROAD STUDENT.
THOUGH, YOUR JAPANESE IS *STILL* REALLY GOOD.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
MY MOTHER TAUGHT ME PROPER JAPANESE.
YOUR MOTHER?
SHE IS A PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETER.
I SEE... I THOUGHT YOU WERE HALF-JAPANESE FOR A MOMENT.
?
"JULIE" CAN ALSO BE A JAPANESE NAME.

TOR, YOUR NAME IS ALSO A NAME IN GIMLÉ.
OH, REALLY?
JA.
AMONG THE MYTHS OF NORTHERN EUROPE, HE IS THE GOD THAT FIGHTS WITH THE GREATEST STRENGTH...
THOR, THE GOD OF THUNDER.
STRENGTH...
HUH...?
IT WOULD BE NICE...
CLENCH
ギュッ…
IF THAT WERE TRUE, BUT...

TOR?
OH... IT'S NOTHING.
BY THE WAY. I SAW HOW YOU FOUGHT DURING THE ENTRANCE CEREMONY...
THE WAY YOU CARRIED YOURSELF... THE WAY YOU USED YOUR SWORDS...
ARE THERE DOJOS OR SOMETHING SIMILAR IN GIMLÉ?
NEJ.
I'M SELF-TAUGHT.
YOU'RE SELF-TAUGHT AND CAN MOVE LIKE THAT? *AMAZING!*
OH, TOR.
NOT TO CHANGE THE SUBJECT, BUT...
IS IT ALL RIGHT IF...
I TAKE MY SHOWER FIRST?
Daze...
YEAH...
I'M SORRY. BECAUSE OF THE JET LAG, I'M EXHAUSTED...
SO I WILL BE GOING TO BED EARLY TODAY.
I UNDERSTAND.
I'M GOING TO ORGANIZE MY STUFF.

SLIP
Squeak...
SHAAAA

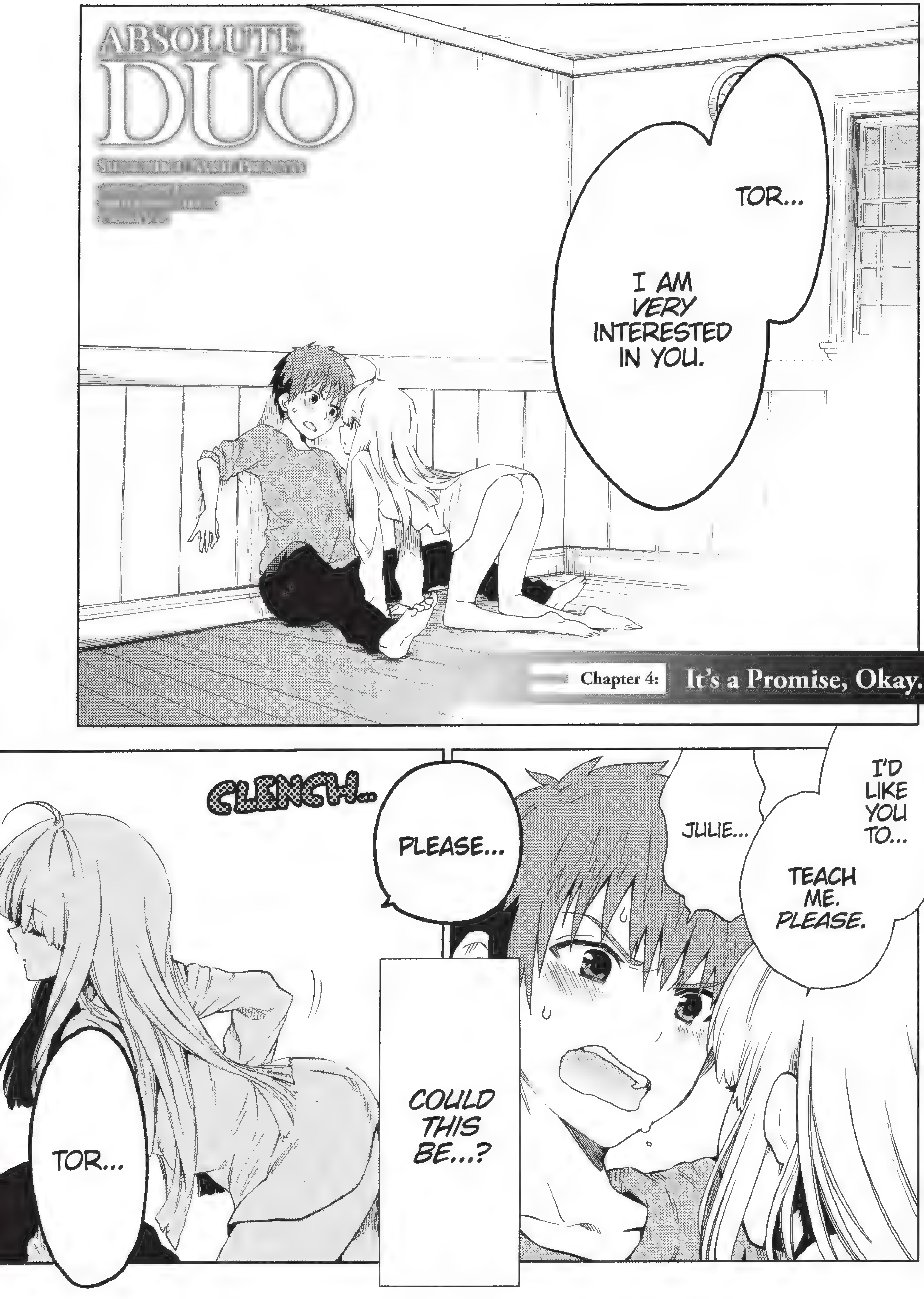

Tick
Tick
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT...
WHY DID SHE...
TOR.
YAWN...
OH, JULIE-- I HAVE SOMETHING I WANTED TO ASK--
Sleepy...
DWAAAAH?!

IS SOMETHING THE MATTER?
N... NO... THAT'S ...!
WANTED...!
AH, TO ASK...
YOU SOMETHING...
HOW DID YOU... KNOW MY NAME...?
I HEARD IT DURING THE EXAM.
IT WASN'T JUST THAT, THOUGH...
I WAS WONDERING WHY YOU KEPT STARING AT ME...
IS IT POSSIBLE YOU'VE **MISTAKEN** ME FOR SOMEONE ELSE?
I...

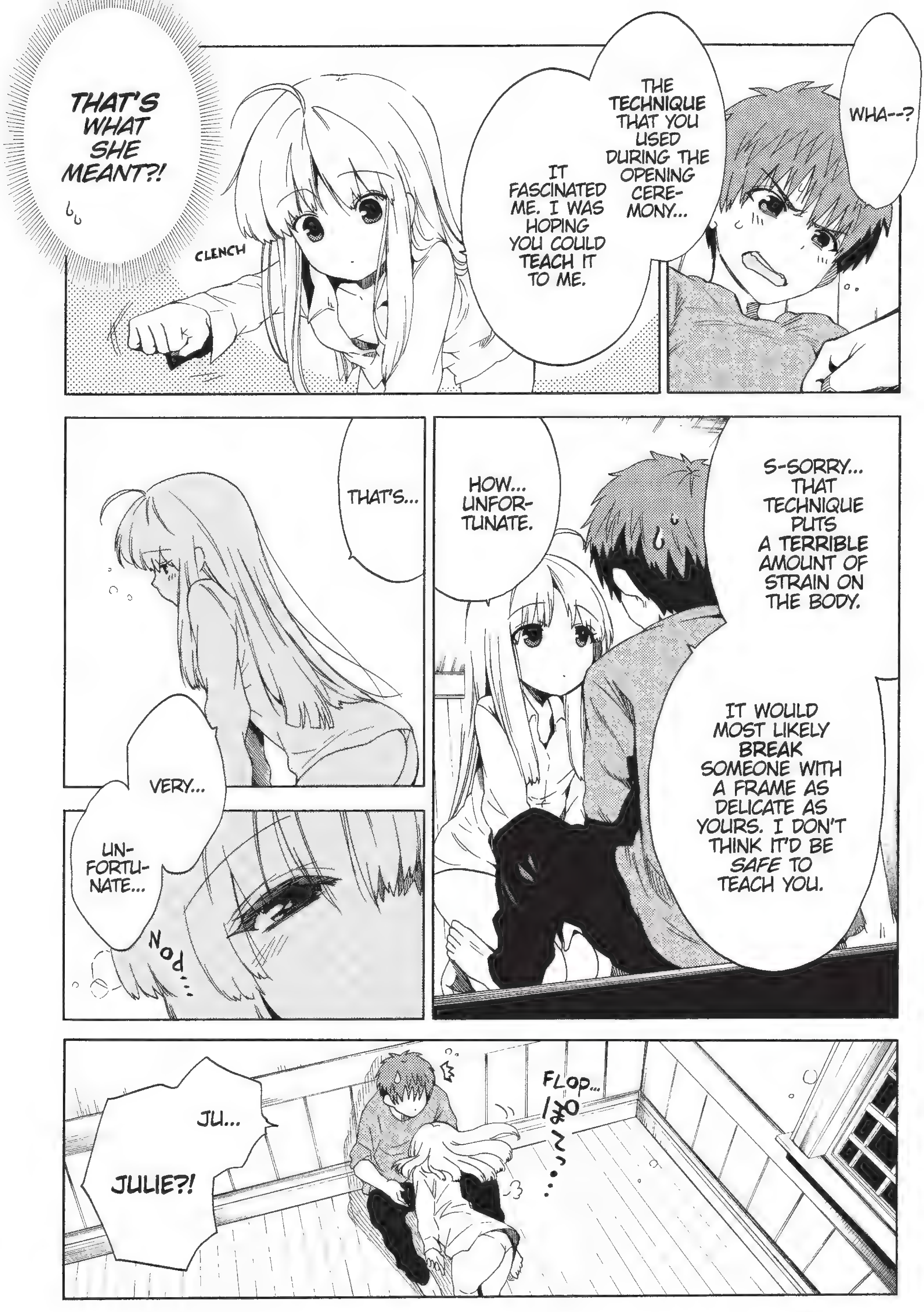
LEAN
ずし!
?!
I...
AM INTERESTED IN YOU.
STARE...

TOR...
I AM...
VERY...
INTER-ESTED IN YOU.

Chapter 4: It's a Promise, Okay...?


ABSOLUTE DUO
TOR...
I AM VERY INTERESTED IN YOU.
I'D LIKE YOU TO...
TEACH ME. PLEASE.
JULIE...
PLEASE...
CLENCH...
COULD THIS BE...?
TOR...

HYUUU
ぴたっ
HALT
TEACH ME...
HOW TO DO THIS.


WHA--?
THE TECHNIQUE THAT YOU USED DURING THE OPENING CEREMONY...
IT FASCINATED ME. I WAS HOPING YOU COULD TEACH IT TO ME.
THAT'S WHAT SHE MEANT?!
CLENCH
S-SORRY... THAT TECHNIQUE PUTS A TERRIBLE AMOUNT OF STRAIN ON THE BODY.
IT WOULD MOST LIKELY BREAK SOMEONE WITH A FRAME AS DELICATE AS YOURS. I DON'T THINK IT'D BE SAFE TO TEACH YOU.
HOW... UNFORTUNATE.
THAT'S...
VERY...
UNFORTUNATE...
Nod...
FLOP...
ぽてっ...
JU...
JULIE?!

ZZ... ZZZ...
SHE FELL ASLEEP?!
She did mention that she was feeling jet lagged...
Snooze
FOR SOMEONE SO DELICATE, HER FIGHTING TALENT IS UNDENIABLY INCREDIBLE.
Hup!
SO... SOFT...
IT'S AMAZING SHE WAS ABLE TO DEVELOP SUCH PHYSICAL ABILITY ALL ON HER OWN.
BUT I WONDER WHAT, EXACTLY...
DROVE HER TO DO THAT?

ワイ CHATTER
ワイ CHATTER
ワイ CHATTER
WHAT AN EXTRAVAGANT SPREAD!
TOR...
I'M GOING TO FIND US A SEAT.
OKAY, THANKS JULIE!
Whisper
Whisper
HEY, IS THAT...
THE BOY AND GIRL WHO'RE *SHARING A ROOM?*
Whisper
HE'S THE IRREGULAR.
Whisper
SO THE **RUMORS** *HAVE STARTED GOING AROUND, HUH...?*
I can hear you, you know...

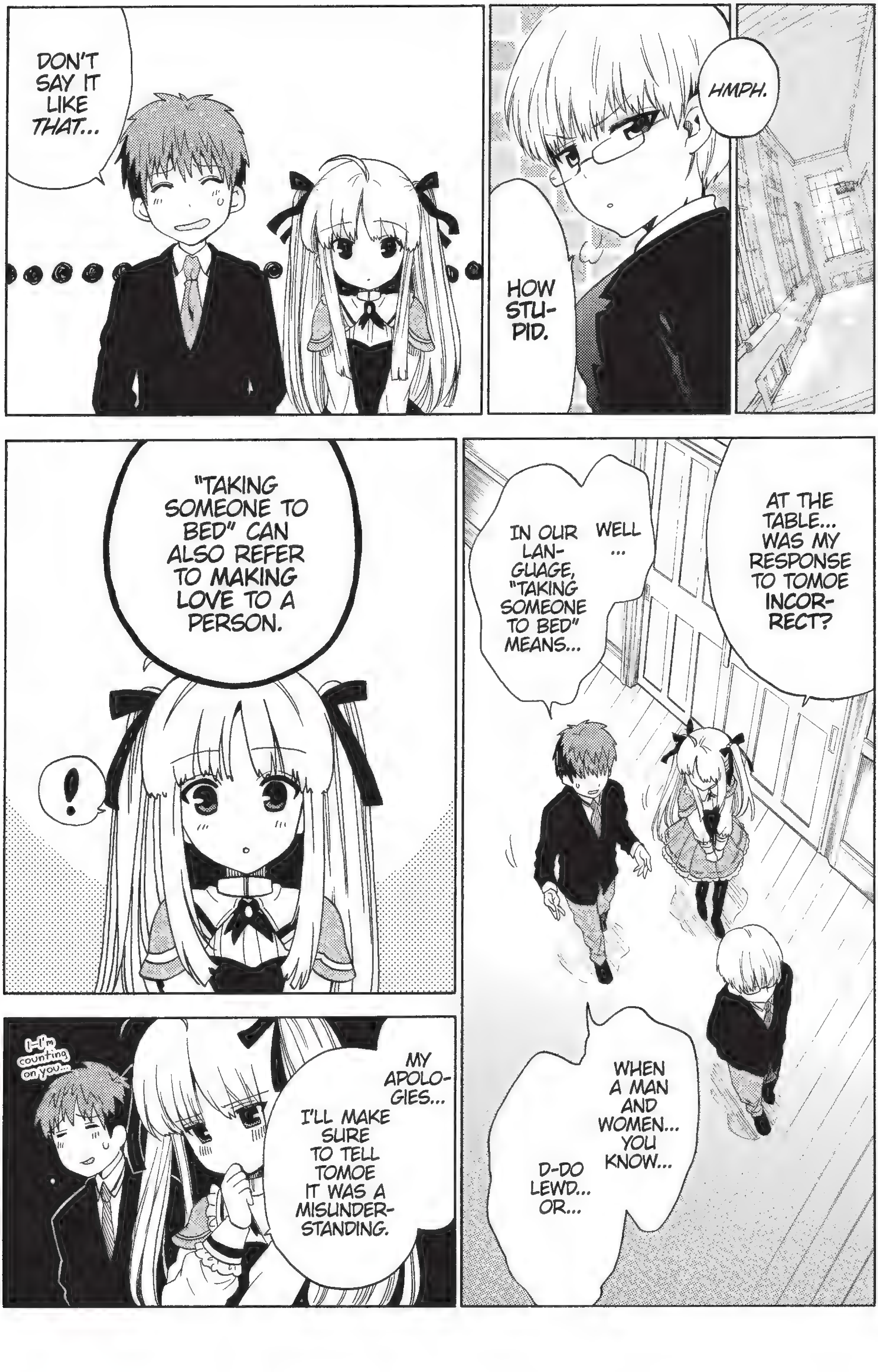
SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING.
SCRAPE
IT'S FINE.
HM?
CLATTER
ガタッ
MIND IF I JOIN YOU...
KOKO-NOE?

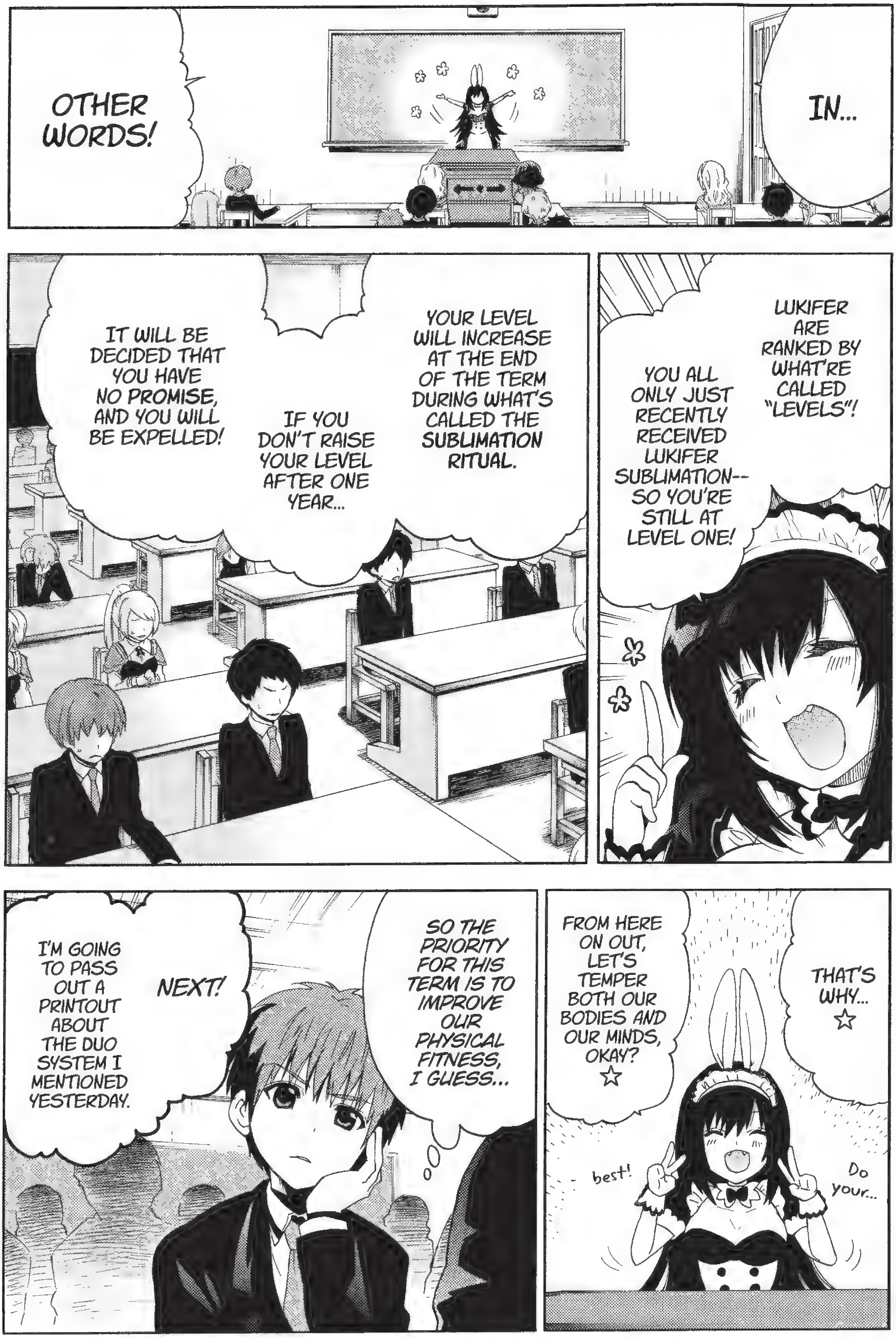
SHE SAT BEHIND ME AT THE ENTRANCE CEREMONY...
Scoot
GOOD MORNING, JULIE.
WERE YOU ABLE TO SLEEP WELL LAST NIGHT?
JA, I DID. GOOD MORNING.
MY NAME IS TACHIBANA TOMOE.
I'M NEW HERE--SAME AS YOU AND KOKONOE.
IS THAT SO? IT'S A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, TOMOE.
Bow
Giggle
NO NEED TO BE SO FORMAL! I HOPE WE'LL BE ABLE TO GET ALONG.
LET ME INTRODUCE MY ROOMMATE, TOO.
MIYABI! OVER HERE!
OH, TOMOE-CHAN!
SO THIS IS WHERE YOU WERE~!
Bounce
たゆっ
Bounce
たゆん

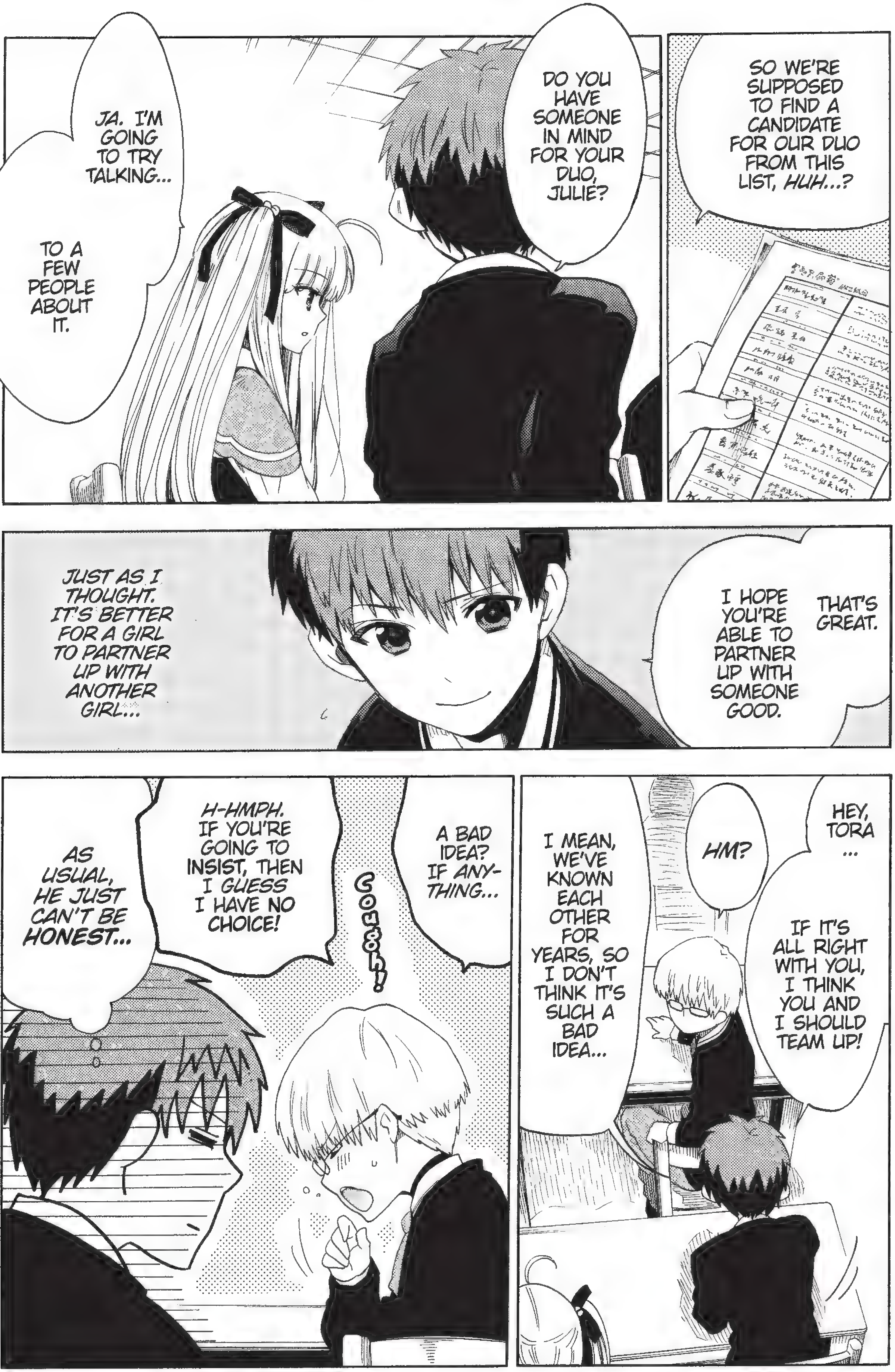
HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU? YOU *REALLY* DON'T NEED TO ADDRESS ME WITH HONORIFICS.
I KNOW, BUT YOU'RE DEAR TO ME!
SO TOMOE-CHAN IS TOMOE-CHAN.
I-IT'S HUGE!!
Her chest...!
OH, *UM*... ARE THESE PEOPLE OUR CLASSMATES...?
JULIE AND KOKONOE.
I-I'M HOTAKA MIYABI.
IT'S... IT'S NICE...
TO MEET YOU...
FWP
?
SORRY... MIYABI PREVIOUSLY ATTENDED AN ALL-GIRLS SCHOOL.
SHE'S JUST A LITTLE AWKWARD AROUND GUYS.
IT'S OKAY. KOKONOE WON'T BITE!
R-REALLY?
WHAT AM I, A DOG?

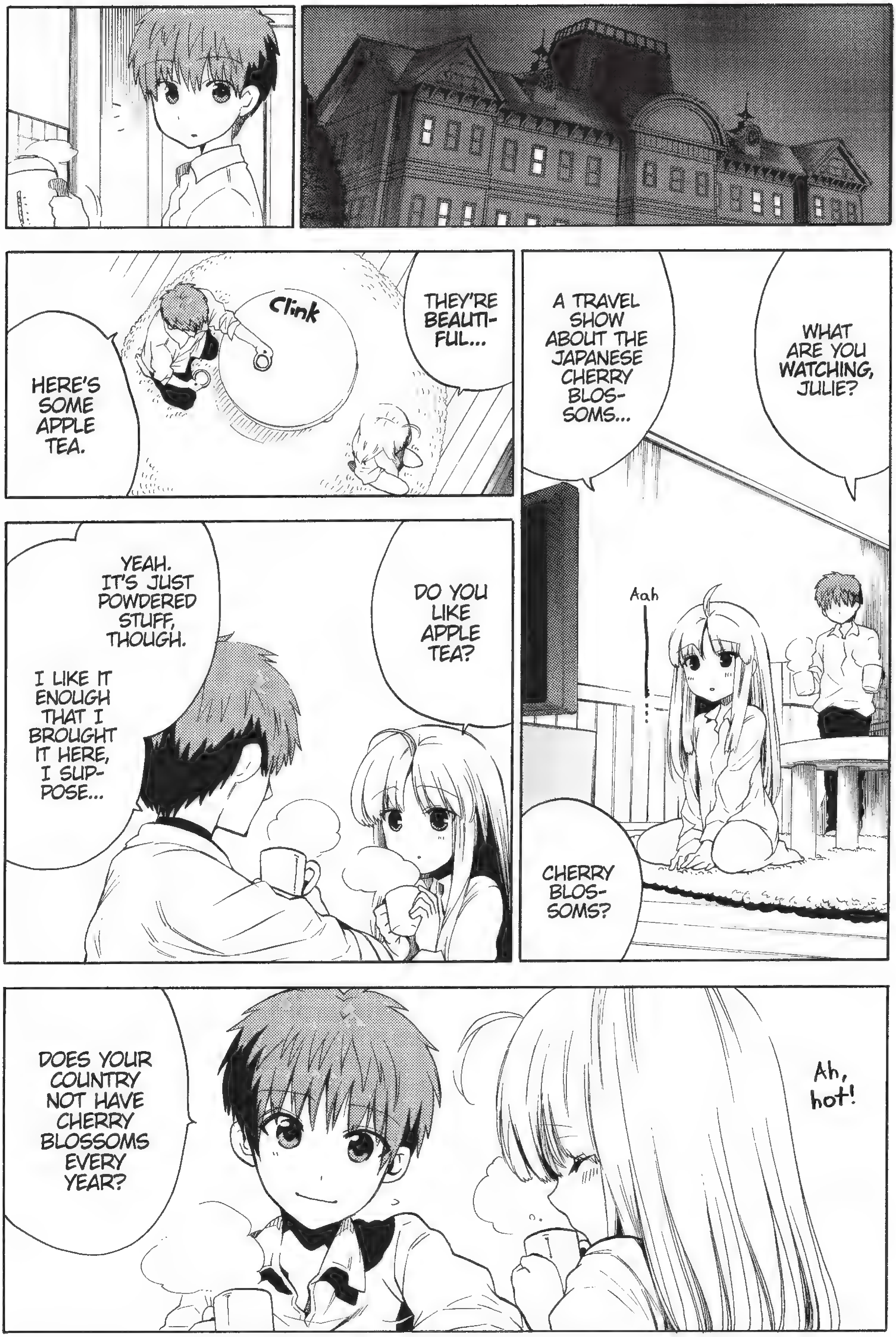
LET'S EAT!
OH MY, KOKONOE. YOUR BREAKFAST IS NOTHING BUT MEAT!
WELL, I *LIKE* MEAT...
Guilty
I REALIZE IT'S A BUFFET, BUT THAT MUCH MEAT REALLY ISN'T HEALTHY! YOU NEED SOME BALANCE IN YOUR DIET.
IN CONSIDERATION OF KOKONOE'S HEALTH...
LET'S DIVVY UP SOME OF OUR VEGETABLES FOR HIM.
UGH, I *HATE* EGGPLANT!
UM... UH... UM...
IS THIS OKAY?
CELERY IS EVEN *WORSE*!
JA.
PHEW... I CAN EAT CARROTS.
Thanks, Julie...
From now on, when you're choosing your meals...
Think more about balance.
I-I understand.

UM, SORRY FOR SAYING THIS IN FRONT OF KOKONOE, JULIE...BUT WE'RE A BIT **CONCERNED** ABOUT YOU. EVEN THOUGH IT'S ONLY FOR A WEEK...
DO YOU REALLY THINK YOU'LL BE OKAY SHARING A ROOM WITH A GUY?
JA. IT'S OKAY.
WELL, IF IT DOESN'T BOTHER YOU, THEN I GUESS IT'S ALL RIGHT.
MY APOLOGIES IF I OFFENDED YOU, KOKONOE.
I JUST WANTED TO MAKE SURE JULIE WAS ALL RIGHT. I FIGURED SHE MIGHT FEEL **AWKWARD** ABOUT HAVING TO LIVE WITH A GUY.
I UNDERSTAND.
IT MAKES SENSE FOR YOU TO WORRY ABOUT THAT.
JA. TOR IS A GENTLE PERSON AND A WONDERFUL ROOMMATE.
I-I SEE...
I'M NOT WORRIED AT ALL. LAST NIGHT, I ACCIDENTLY FELL ASLEEP FIRST...
AND HE TOOK ME TO BED.
BFFFFSTTTUUTTTT!!


HMPH.
HOW STUPID.
DON'T SAY IT LIKE THAT...
AT THE TABLE... WAS MY RESPONSE TO TOMOE INCORRECT?
WELL...
IN OUR LANGUAGE, "TAKING SOMEONE TO BED" MEANS...
WHEN A MAN AND WOMEN... YOU KNOW...
D-DO LEWD... OR...
!
"TAKING SOMEONE TO BED" CAN ALSO REFER TO MAKING LOVE TO A PERSON.
MY APOLOGIES... I'LL MAKE SURE TO TELL TOMOE IT WAS A MISUNDERSTANDING.
I-I'm counting on you...

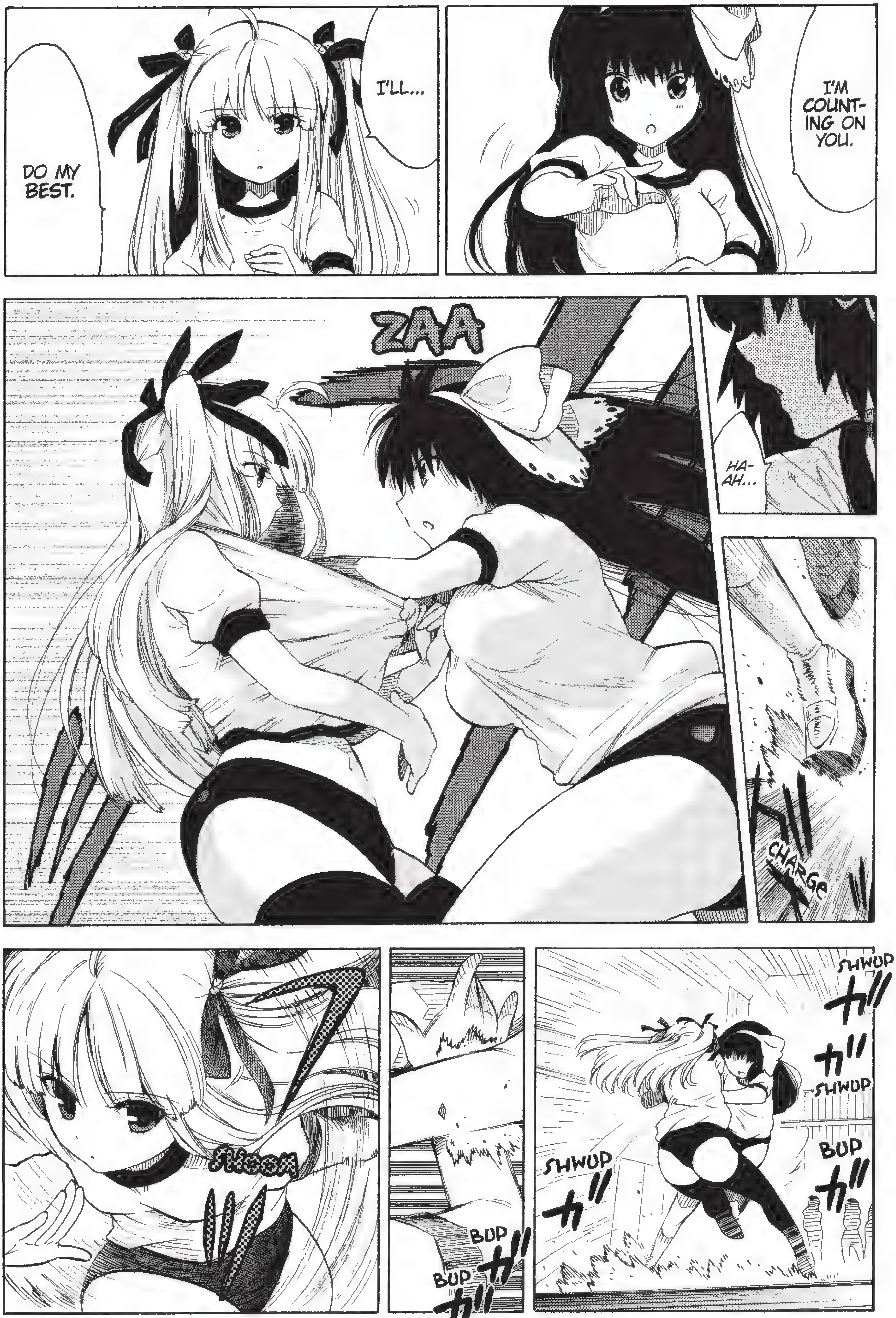

IN...
OTHER WORDS!
LUKIFER ARE RANKED BY WHAT'RE CALLED "LEVELS"!
YOU ALL ONLY JUST RECENTLY RECEIVED LUKIFER SUBLIMATION--SO YOU'RE STILL AT LEVEL ONE!
YOUR LEVEL WILL INCREASE AT THE END OF THE TERM DURING WHAT'S CALLED THE **SUBLIMATION RITUAL**.
IF YOU DON'T RAISE YOUR LEVEL AFTER ONE YEAR...
IT WILL BE DECIDED THAT YOU HAVE **NO PROMISE**, AND YOU WILL BE EXPELLED!
THAT'S WHY... ☆
FROM HERE ON OUT, LET'S TEMPER BOTH OUR BODIES AND OUR MINDS, OKAY? ☆
Do your...
best!
SO THE PRIORITY FOR THIS TERM IS TO IMPROVE OUR PHYSICAL FITNESS, I GUESS...
NEXT!
I'M GOING TO PASS OUT A PRINTOUT ABOUT THE DUO SYSTEM I MENTIONED YESTERDAY.


SO WE'RE SUPPOSED TO FIND A CANDIDATE FOR OUR DUO FROM THIS LIST, *HUH*...?
DO YOU HAVE SOMEONE IN MIND FOR YOUR DUO, JULIE?
JA. I'M GOING TO TRY TALKING...
TO A FEW PEOPLE ABOUT IT.
THAT'S GREAT.
I HOPE YOU'RE ABLE TO PARTNER UP WITH SOMEONE GOOD.
JUST AS I THOUGHT. IT'S BETTER FOR A GIRL TO PARTNER UP WITH ANOTHER GIRL...
HEY, TORA...
IF IT'S ALL RIGHT WITH YOU, I THINK YOU AND I SHOULD TEAM UP!
HM?
I MEAN, WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR YEARS, SO I DON'T THINK IT'S SUCH A BAD IDEA...
A BAD IDEA? IF *ANY*THING...
Cough!
H-HMPH. IF YOU'RE GOING TO INSIST, THEN I *GUESS* I HAVE NO CHOICE!
*AS USUAL, HE JUST CAN'T BE **HONEST**...*


WHAT ARE YOU WATCHING, JULIE?
A TRAVEL SHOW ABOUT THE JAPANESE CHERRY BLOSSOMS...
THEY'RE BEAUTIFUL...
Clink
HERE'S SOME APPLE TEA.
Aah
CHERRY BLOSSOMS?
DO YOU LIKE APPLE TEA?
YEAH. IT'S JUST POWDERED STUFF, THOUGH.
I LIKE IT ENOUGH THAT I BROUGHT IT HERE, I SUPPOSE...
Ah, hot!
DOES YOUR COUNTRY NOT HAVE CHERRY BLOSSOMS EVERY YEAR?

NEJ. THERE AREN'T ANY CHERRY TREES IN MY HOMELAND.
I WONDER IF THERE'RE ANY ON CAMPUS...
HUH?
YOU WANT TO GO SEE THEM SOMETIME? THEY PROBABLY AREN'T AS SPLENDID AS THE ONES ON TV, THOUGH...
JA.
I'D LOVE TO GO.
I'M REALLY...
REALLY...
LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.
Raaaah!
ワァァァ…!

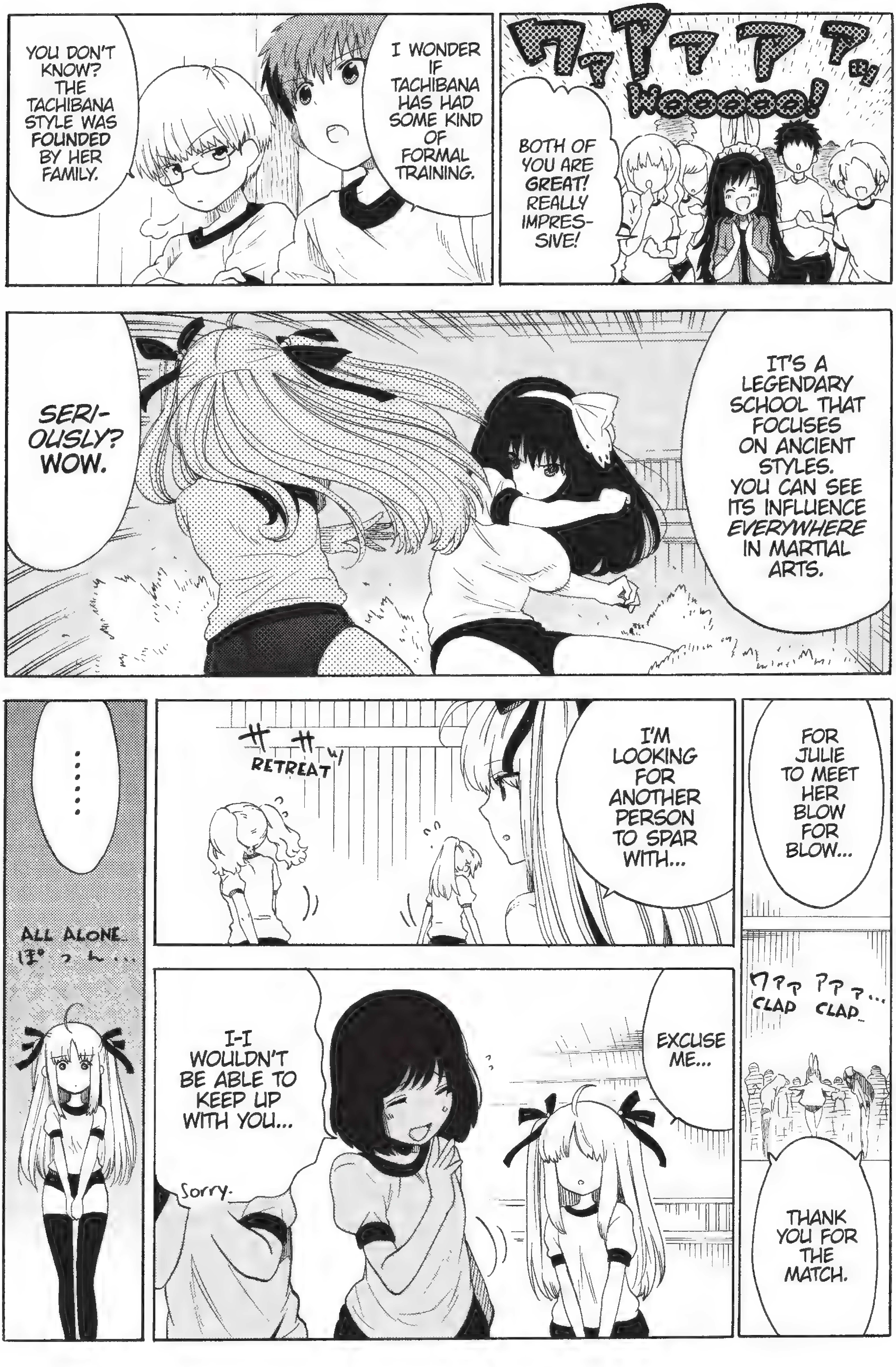
SHWUD
POW
SPAR-RING...
OR IN OTHER WORDS, FREEFORM KUMITE KARATE PRACTICE, *HUH?*
THUD
THUD
THUD
WUNK
IT SEEMS WRONG TO SUDDENLY FORCE THE FIRST-YEARS TO FIGHT. MOST OF THEM ARE AMATEURS...
YOU *DID* SAY THIS PLACE WASN'T NORMAL...
Hmph.
SERIOUSLY, THOUGH-- THIS PLACE IS *RIDICULOUS*...
Raaaah!
CLOP
CHING...
JULIE AND...
TACHI-BANA.

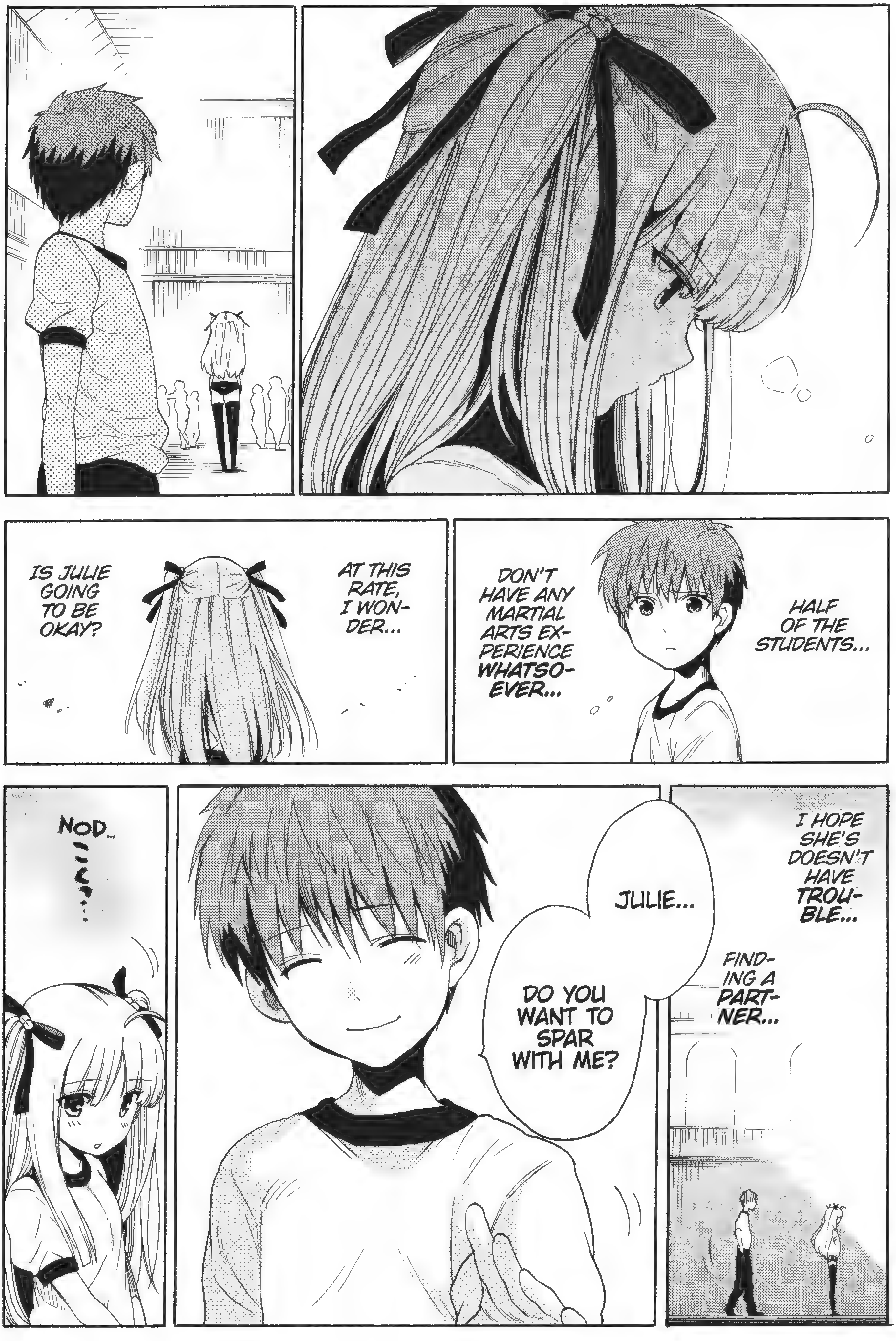

I'M COUNTING ON YOU.
I'LL...
DO MY BEST.
HA-AH...
CHARGE
ZAA
SHWUP
ガ
ガ
SHWUP
BUP
ガ
SHWUP
ガ
BUP
ガ
BUP
ガ
SHOOM

DWAAN
DANG!
FHOOM
GAAN
FWUU
!

GWAP
YOU'RE PRETTY...
GOOD!!
DROO
HOP...

TMP
GYUUUN
SHE'S FAST...!!
DR-POW

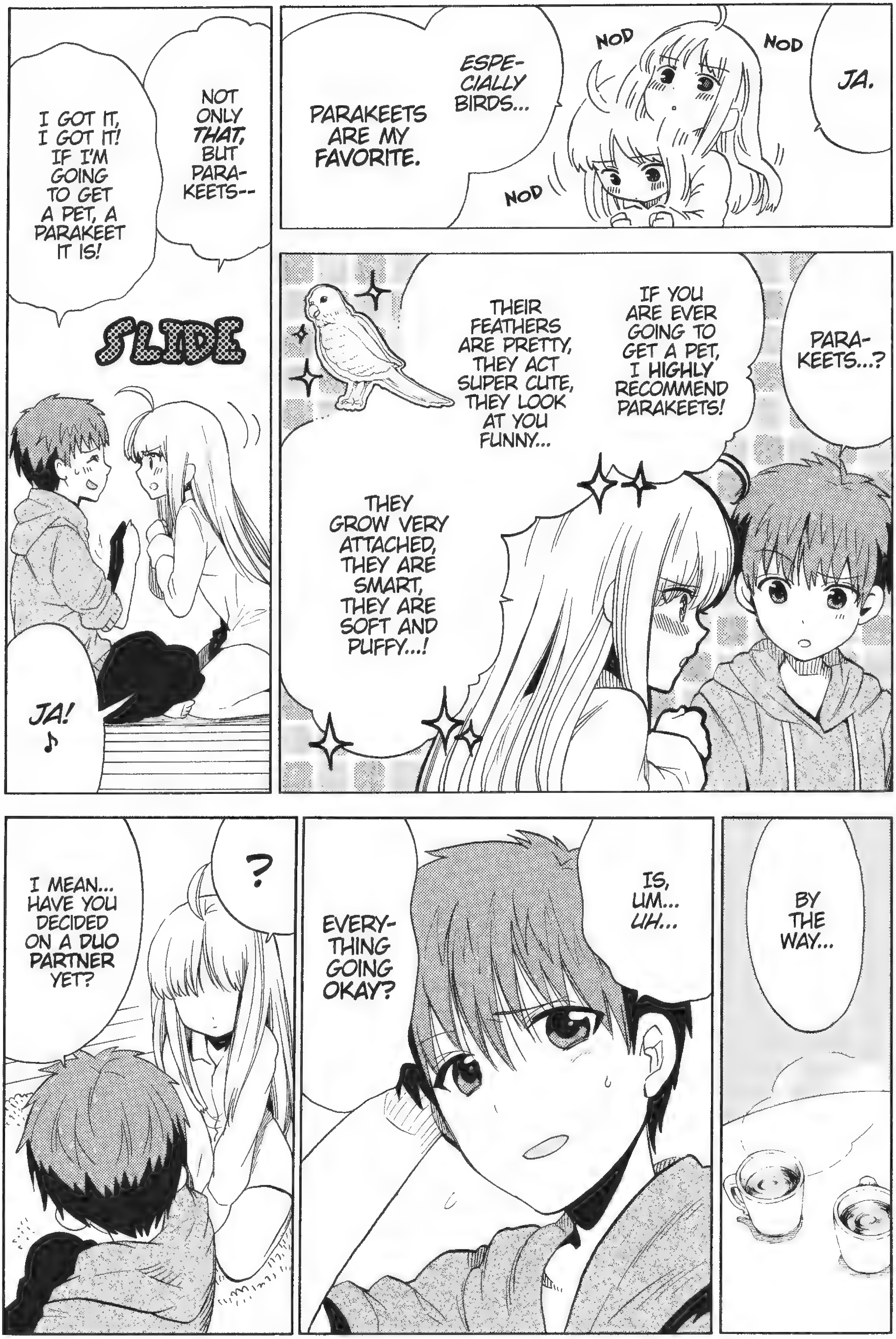

ワァァアァァァッ
Woooooo!
BOTH OF YOU ARE GREAT! REALLY IMPRESSIVE!
I WONDER IF TACHIBANA HAS HAD SOME KIND OF FORMAL TRAINING.
YOU DON'T KNOW? THE TACHIBANA STYLE WAS FOUNDED BY HER FAMILY.
IT'S A LEGENDARY SCHOOL THAT FOCUSES ON ANCIENT STYLES. YOU CAN SEE ITS INFLUENCE *EVERYWHERE* IN MARTIAL ARTS.
SERIOUSLY? WOW.
FOR JULIE TO MEET HER BLOW FOR BLOW...
ワァァ アァァ...
CLAP CLAP
THANK YOU FOR THE MATCH.
I'M LOOKING FOR ANOTHER PERSON TO SPAR WITH...
ササッ
RETREAT
EXCUSE ME...
I-I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO KEEP UP WITH YOU...
Sorry.
......
ALL ALONE
ぽつん...

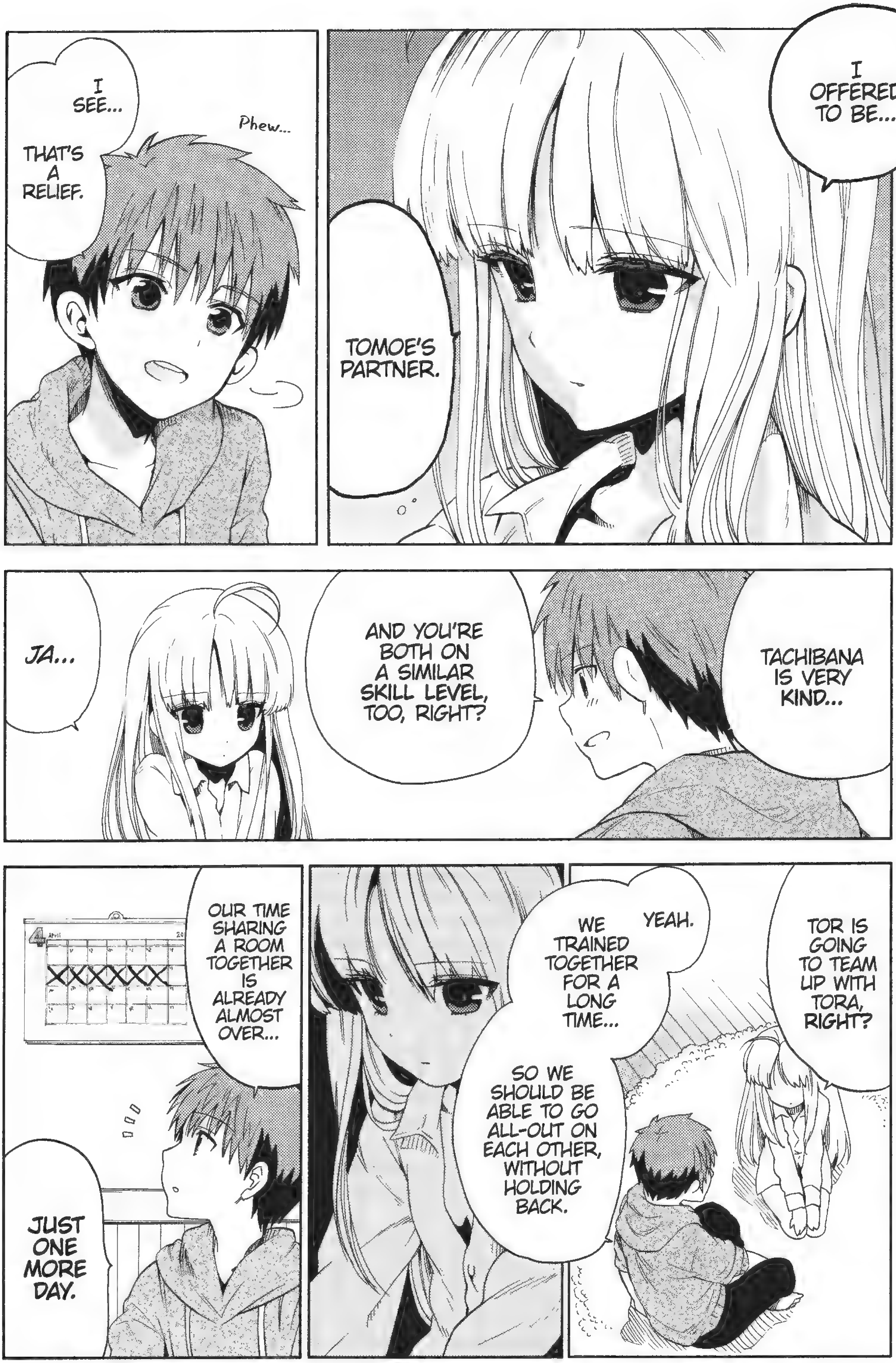

HALF OF THE STUDENTS...
DON'T HAVE ANY MARTIAL ARTS EXPERIENCE WHATSOEVER...
AT THIS RATE, I WONDER...
IS JULIE GOING TO BE OKAY?
I HOPE SHE'S DOESN'T HAVE TROUBLE...
FINDING A PARTNER...
JULIE...
DO YOU WANT TO SPAR WITH ME?
NOD...
こく…

HAAH.
SH-WAM

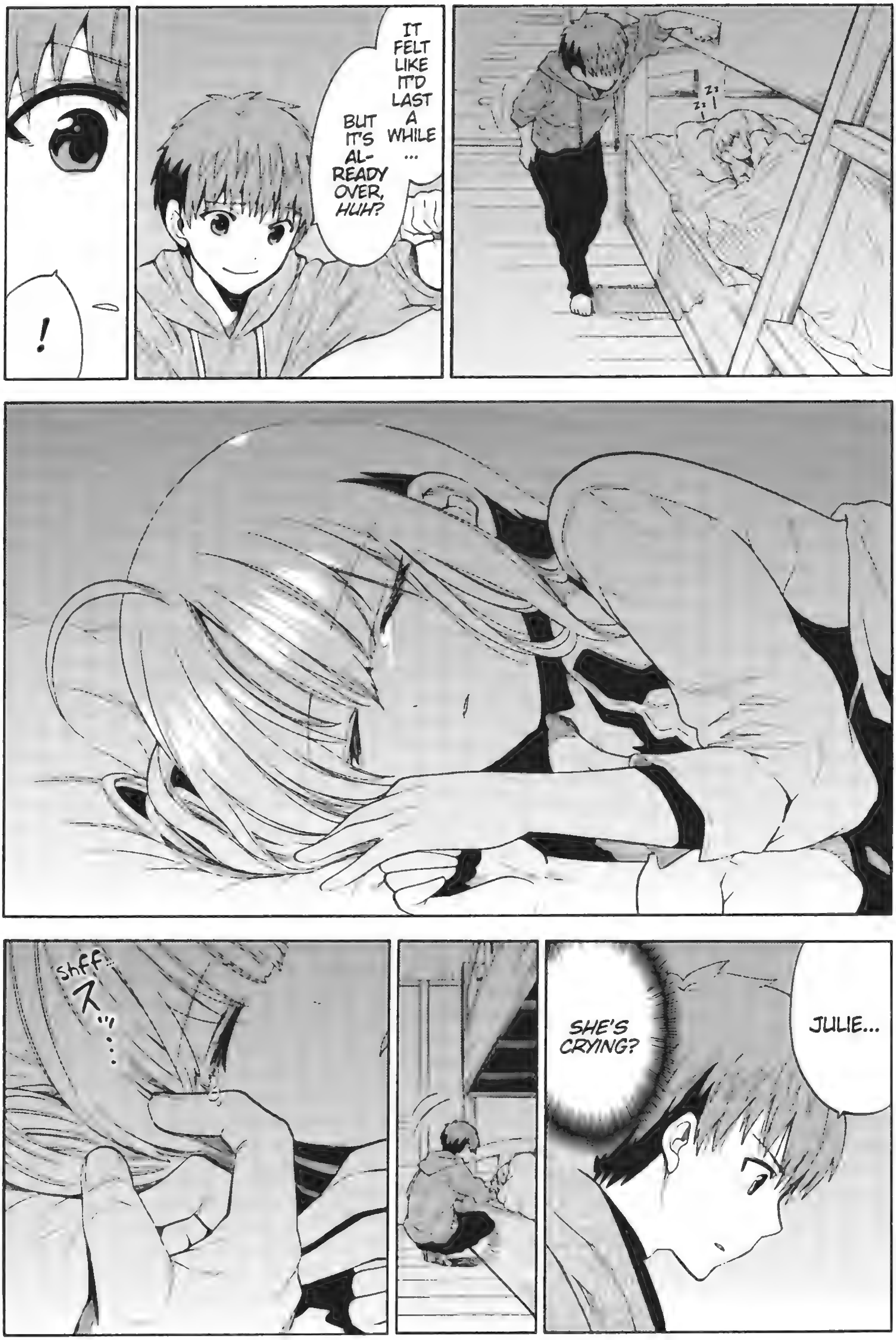
GA
GA
GA
GA
LIKE I THOUGHT...
SHE'S STRONG.
THK
THN
GA
GA
GA
INCREDIBLE...
LOOK!
LOOK!
HYAA!!
FOOM
FUOO
HYUUSH

!
GRA-WHAM
AAAAND IT'S OVER...
THUN THWUD
OOF!
CU...
STARE
CUU-UTE...
Ow...
JULIE, DO YOU LIKE ANIMALS?

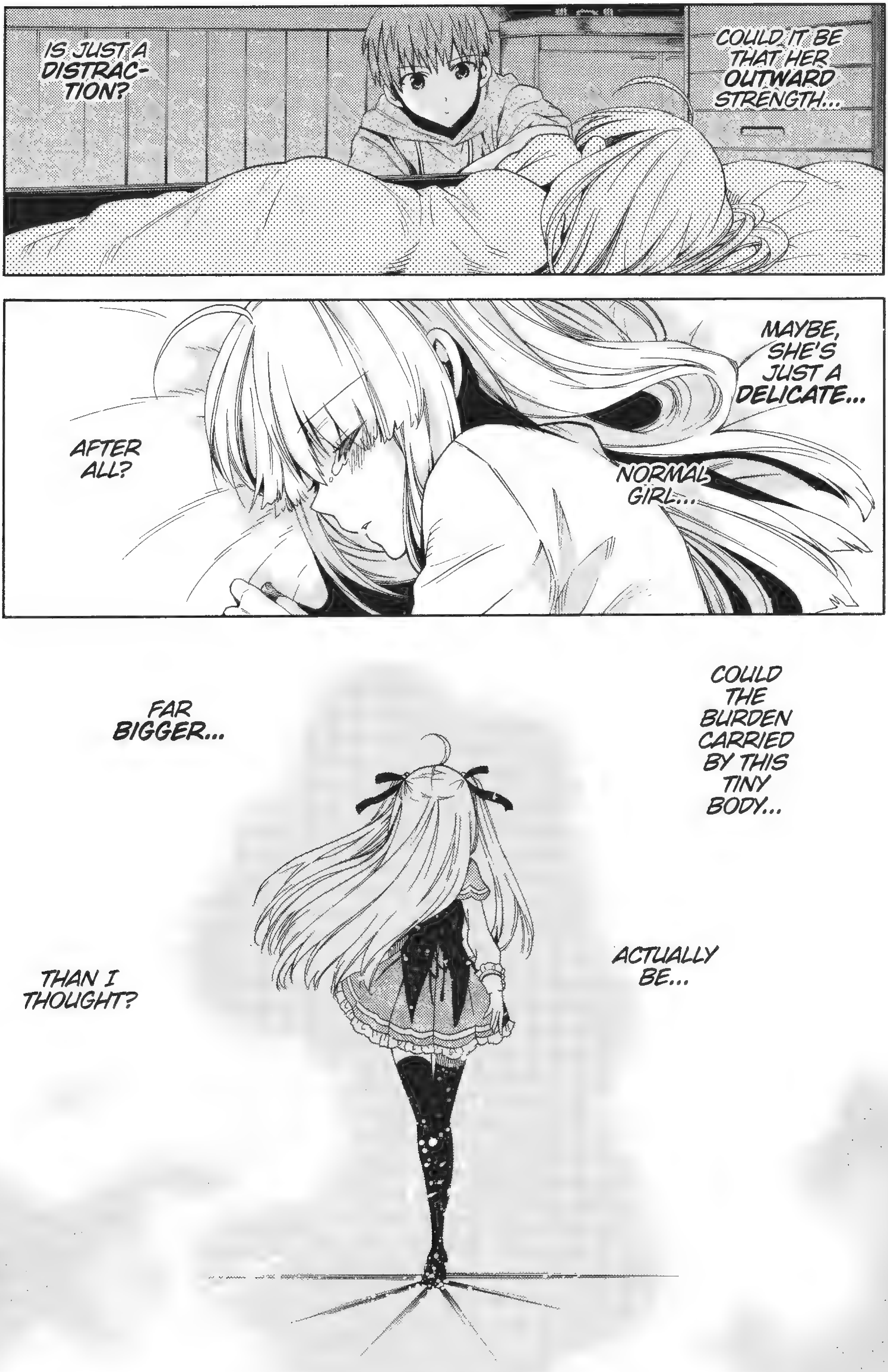

JA.
NOD
NOD
NOD
ESPECIALLY BIRDS...
PARAKEETS ARE MY FAVORITE.
PARAKEETS...?
IF YOU ARE EVER GOING TO GET A PET, I HIGHLY RECOMMEND PARAKEETS!
THEIR FEATHERS ARE PRETTY, THEY ACT SUPER CUTE, THEY LOOK AT YOU FUNNY...
THEY GROW VERY ATTACHED, THEY ARE SMART, THEY ARE SOFT AND PUFFY...!
NOT ONLY *THAT*, BUT PARAKEETS--
I GOT IT, I GOT IT! IF I'M GOING TO GET A PET, A PARAKEET IT IS!
SLIDE
JA! ♪
BY THE WAY...
IS, UM... UH...
EVERYTHING GOING OKAY?
?
I MEAN... HAVE YOU DECIDED ON A DUO PARTNER YET?


I OFFERED TO BE...
TOMOE'S PARTNER.
Phew...
I SEE... THAT'S A RELIEF.
TACHIBANA IS VERY KIND...
AND YOU'RE BOTH ON A SIMILAR SKILL LEVEL, TOO, RIGHT?
JA...
TOR IS GOING TO TEAM UP WITH TORA, RIGHT?
YEAH.
WE TRAINED TOGETHER FOR A LONG TIME...
SO WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO GO ALL-OUT ON EACH OTHER, WITHOUT HOLDING BACK.
April
OUR TIME SHARING A ROOM TOGETHER IS ALREADY ALMOST OVER...
JUST ONE MORE DAY.

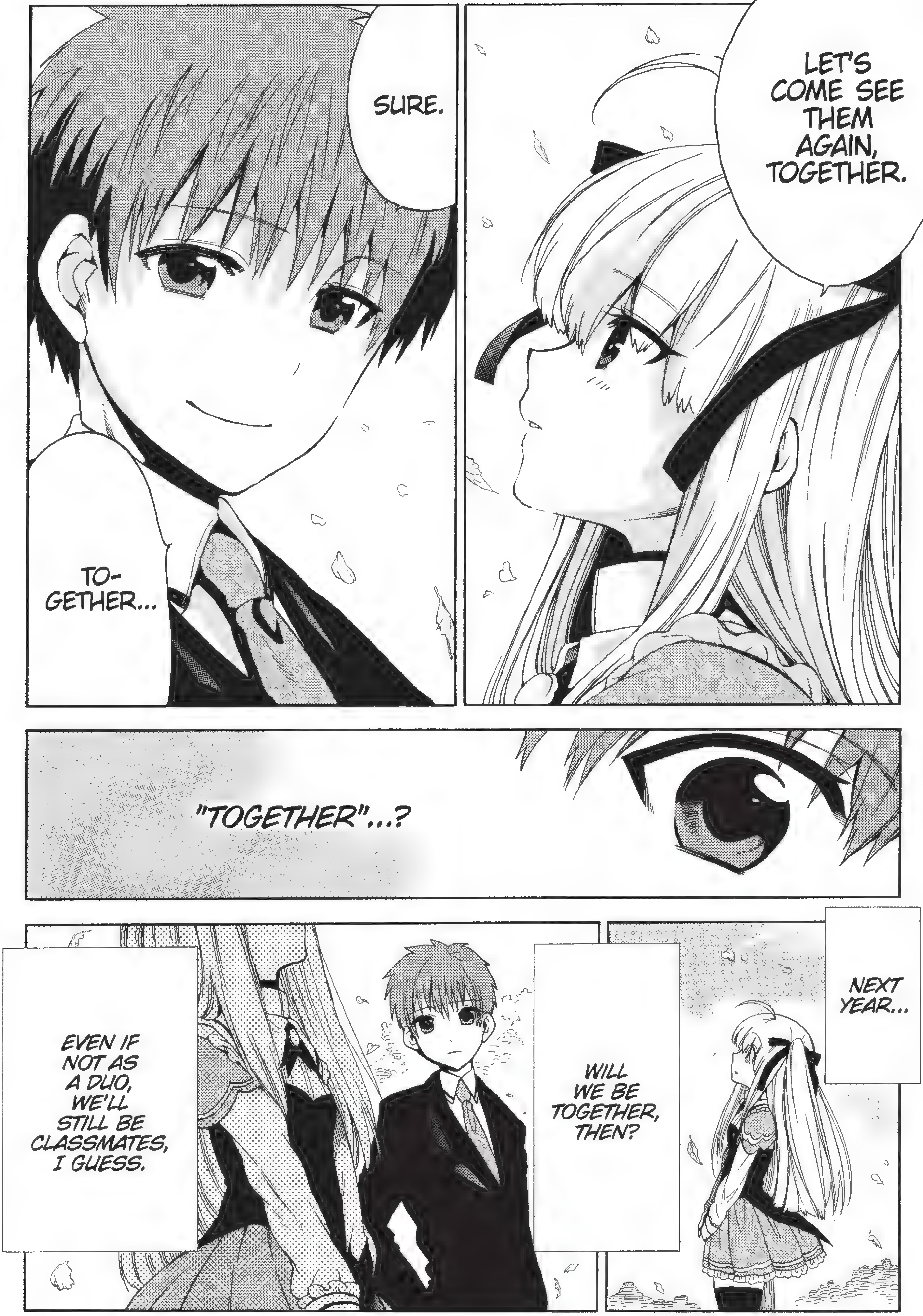
THAT'S RIGHT...
I PROMISED THAT WE WOULD GO AND SEE THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS, DIDN'T I?
LET'S GO SEE THEM FIRST THING TOMORROW.
THEN, AT NIGHT...
WE CAN HAVE A QUIET GOODBYE PARTY TO FINISH UP OUR ROOMSHARE.
TOR...
....
NEVER MIND...


z z z
IT FELT LIKE IT'D LAST A WHILE...
BUT IT'S ALREADY OVER, HUH?
!
JULIE...
SHE'S CRYING?
shff...
ス…

——!!
PAPA...

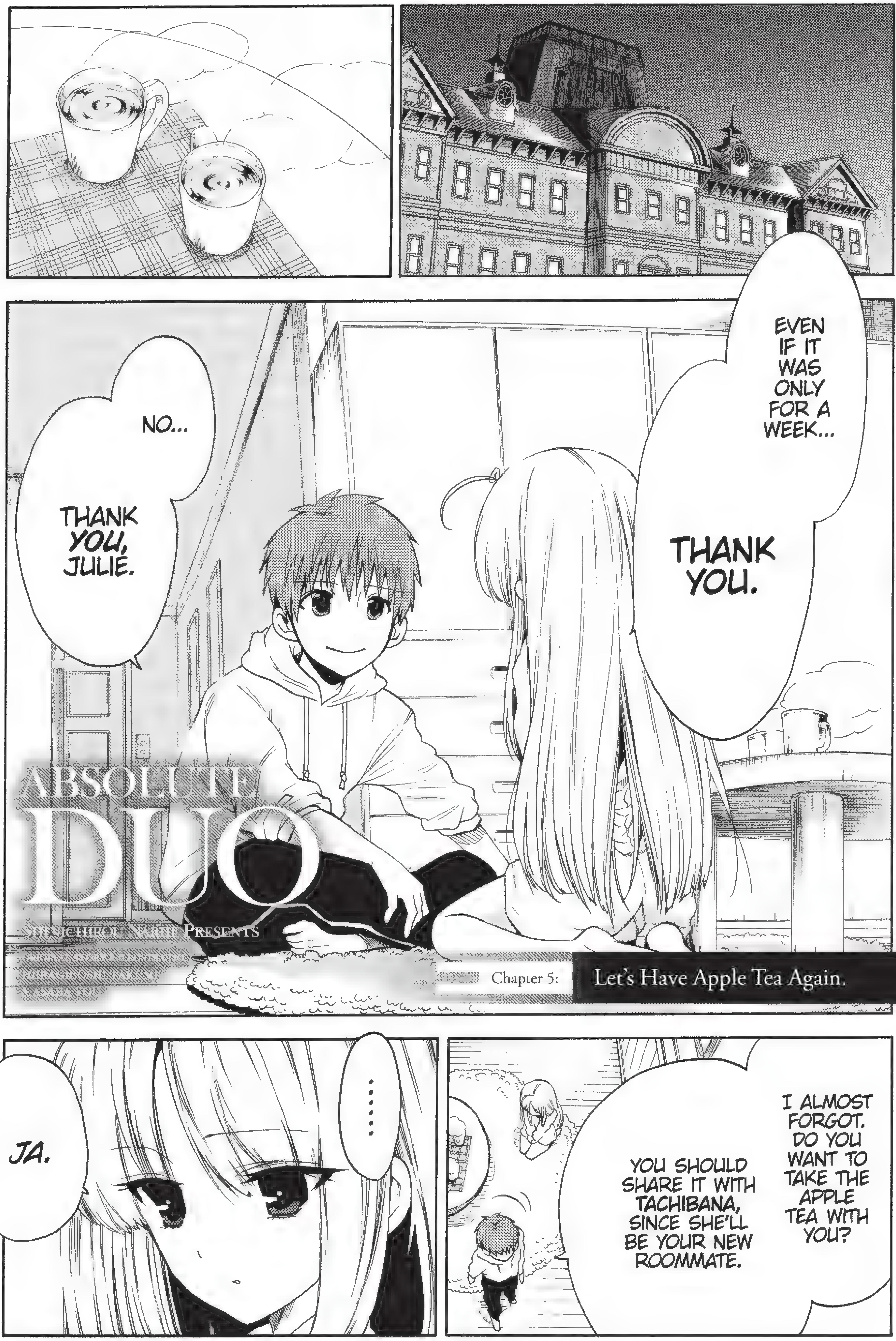

COULD IT BE THAT HER OUTWARD STRENGTH...
IS JUST A DISTRACTION?
MAYBE, SHE'S JUST A DELICATE...
NORMAL GIRL...
AFTER ALL?
COULD THE BURDEN CARRIED BY THIS TINY BODY...
ACTUALLY BE...
FAR BIGGER...
THAN I THOUGHT?

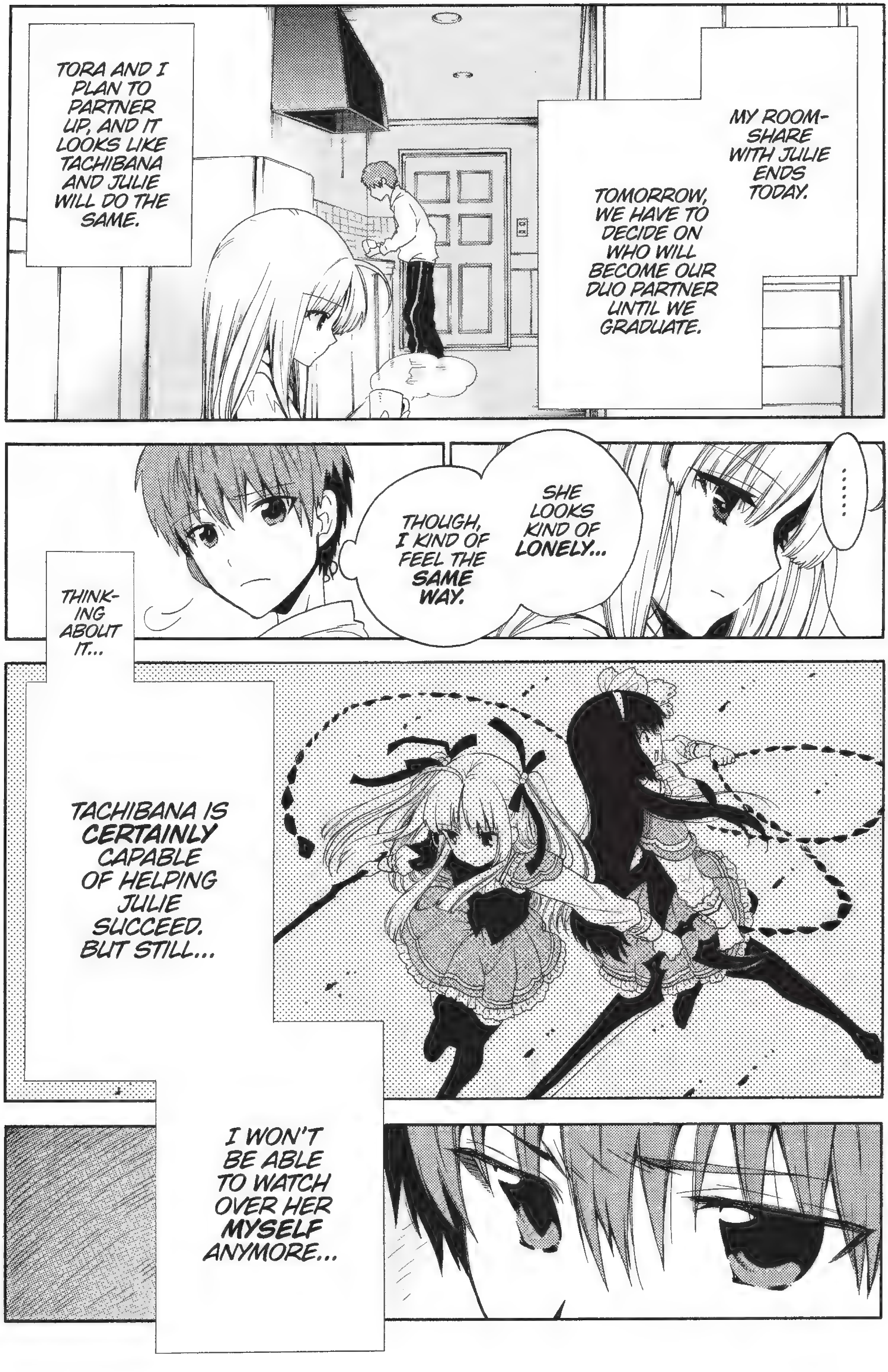
A LOT OF THE PETALS HAVE ALREADY FALLEN...
FWOOO
THE TREES ARE LOOKING A LITTLE BARE.
SORRY FOR GETTING YOUR HOPES UP.
NEJ.
IT DOESN'T MAKE THEM ANY LESS BEAUTIFUL.
IT MIGHT BE HASTY TO SAY THIS NOW, BUT...
WHEN THE TREES ARE IN FULL BLOOM.
LET'S COME SEE THEM AGAIN NEXT YEAR...
JA.
I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.


LET'S COME SEE THEM AGAIN, TOGETHER.
SURE.
TOGETHER...
"TOGETHER"...?
NEXT YEAR...
WILL WE BE TOGETHER, THEN?
EVEN IF NOT AS A DUO, WE'LL STILL BE CLASSMATES, I GUESS.

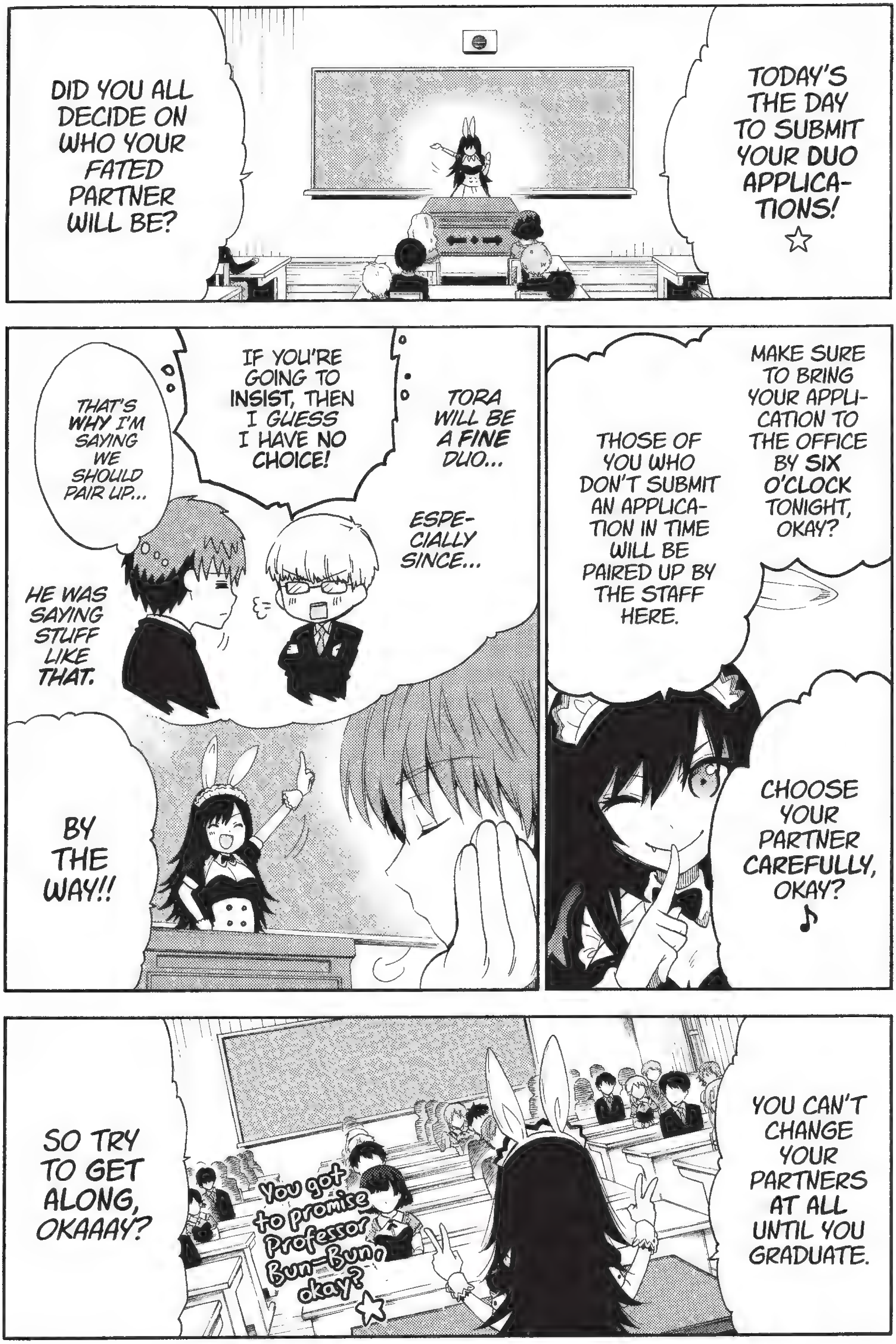
ADMIRING HER STRENGTH...
AND SEEING HER WITH HER GUARD DOWN...
WILL I...?
TOGETHER, NEXT YEAR.
IT'S A PROMISE, OKAY?
TOR.

YEAH.
ABSO-LUTELY.
IT'S A PROMISE.


EVEN IF IT WAS ONLY FOR A WEEK...
THANK YOU.
NO...
THANK *YOU*, JULIE.
ABSOLUTE DUO
Shinichirou Narie Presents
Original Story & Illustration Hiiragiboshi Takumi & Asaba You
Chapter 5: Let's Have Apple Tea Again.
I ALMOST FORGOT. DO YOU WANT TO TAKE THE APPLE TEA WITH YOU?
YOU SHOULD SHARE IT WITH TACHIBANA, SINCE SHE'LL BE YOUR NEW ROOMMATE.
......
JA.

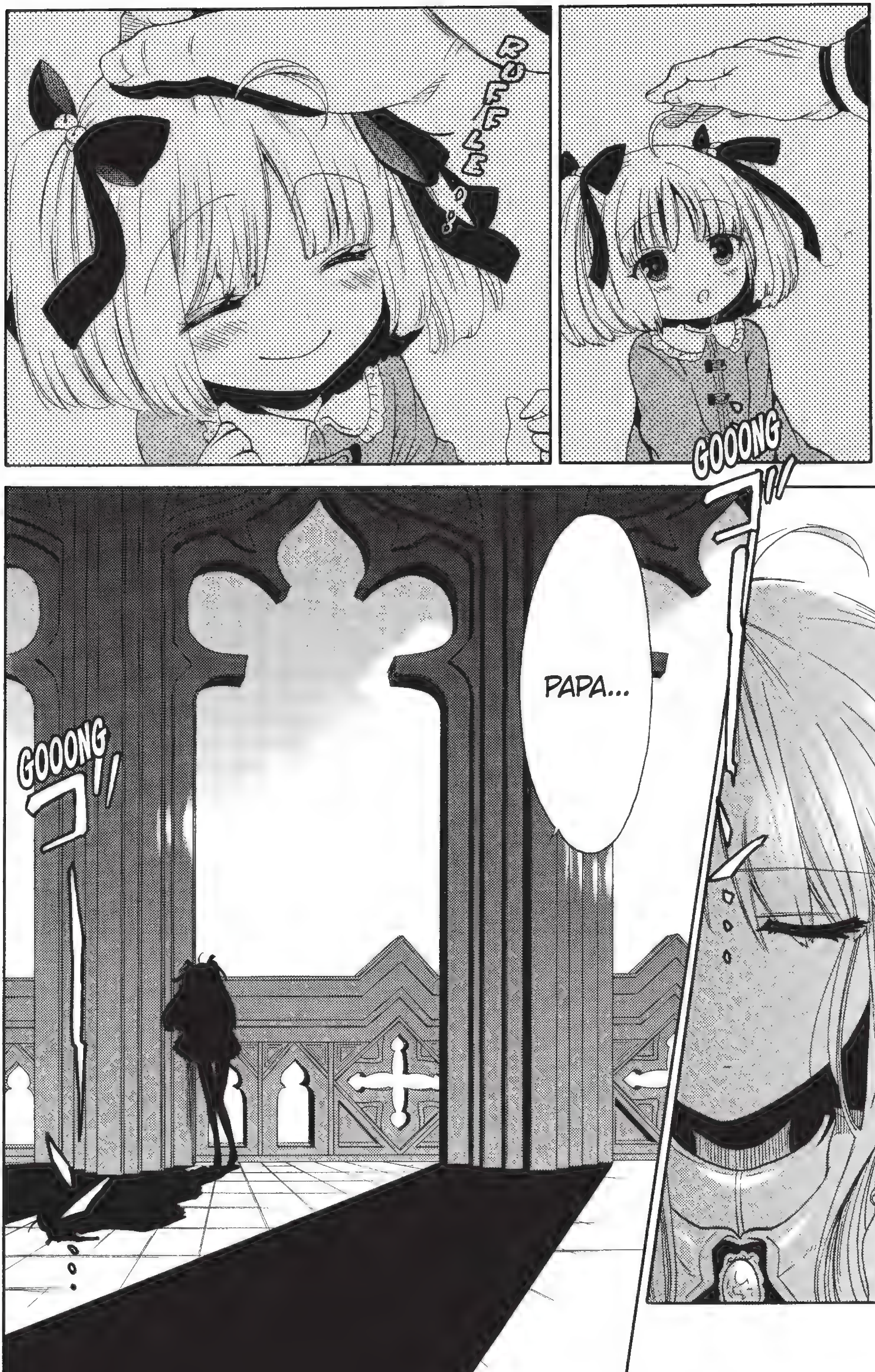

MY ROOM-SHARE WITH JULIE ENDS TODAY.
TOMORROW, WE HAVE TO DECIDE ON WHO WILL BECOME OUR DUO PARTNER UNTIL WE GRADUATE.
TORA AND I PLAN TO PARTNER UP, AND IT LOOKS LIKE TACHIBANA AND JULIE WILL DO THE SAME.
......
SHE LOOKS KIND OF **LONELY**...
THOUGH, I KIND OF FEEL THE **SAME WAY.**
THINKING ABOUT IT...
TACHIBANA IS **CERTAINLY** CAPABLE OF HELPING JULIE SUCCEED. BUT STILL...
I WON'T BE ABLE TO WATCH OVER HER **MYSELF** ANYMORE...

THIS LINE OF THINKING IS POINTLESS.
IF JULIE'S ALREADY DECIDED ON A PARTNER...
Fuuu...
THEN I GUESS... THERE'S NOTHING LEFT FOR ME TO SAY...
TOR? WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?
OH... IT'S NOTHING IMPORTANT.
THANK YOU FOR BEING MY ROOMMATE...
JULIE.
JA.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
FWSSSSH
ALL RIGHT, EVERYONE!
WE'LL BE HAVING A SHORT HOMEROOM TODAY!!


TODAY'S THE DAY TO SUBMIT YOUR DUO APPLICATIONS! ☆
DID YOU ALL DECIDE ON WHO YOUR FATED PARTNER WILL BE?
MAKE SURE TO BRING YOUR APPLICATION TO THE OFFICE BY SIX O'CLOCK TONIGHT, OKAY?
THOSE OF YOU WHO DON'T SUBMIT AN APPLICATION IN TIME WILL BE PAIRED UP BY THE STAFF HERE.
CHOOSE YOUR PARTNER CAREFULLY, OKAY? ♪
TORA WILL BE A FINE DUO...
IF YOU'RE GOING TO INSIST, THEN I GUESS I HAVE NO CHOICE!
THAT'S WHY I'M SAYING WE SHOULD PAIR UP...
ESPECIALLY SINCE...
HE WAS SAYING STUFF LIKE THAT.
BY THE WAY!!
YOU CAN'T CHANGE YOUR PARTNERS AT ALL UNTIL YOU GRADUATE.
You got to promise Professor Bun-Bun, okay? ☆
SO TRY TO GET ALONG, OKAAAY?

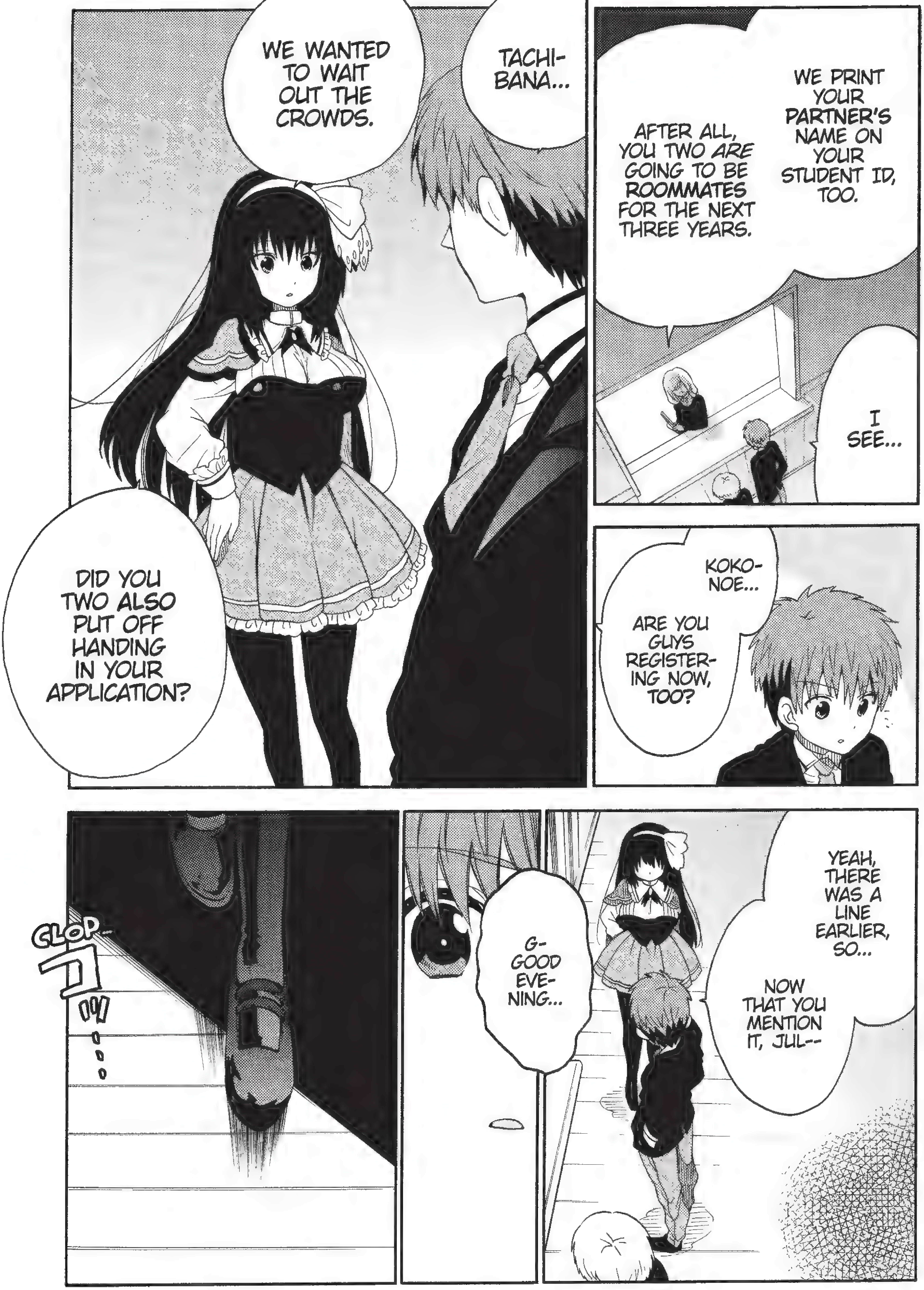
MURMUR
MURMUR
DO YOU WANT TO HEAD OVER THERE NOW, TORA?
HMPH. WE CAN GO LATER, RIGHT?
IT WOULD BE A WASTE OF TIME TO GO LINE UP WITH EVERYONE ELSE.
IN THAT CASE, LET'S GRAB LUNCH FIRST.
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT...
JULIE...
SHE MUST HAVE ALREADY GONE TO REGISTER WITH TACHIBANA...

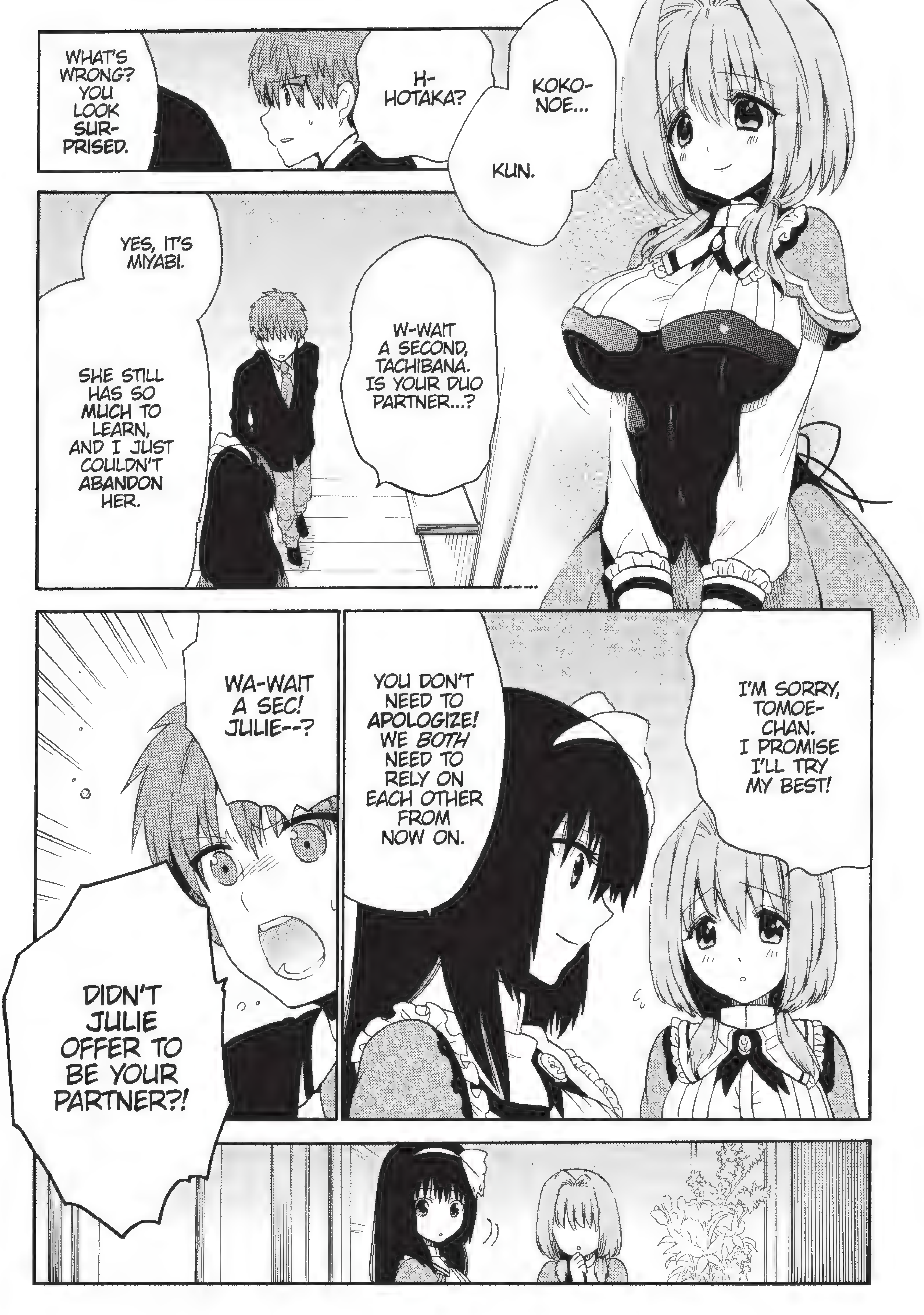
CHING...
チ
KLOK
カッ
KLOK
カッ

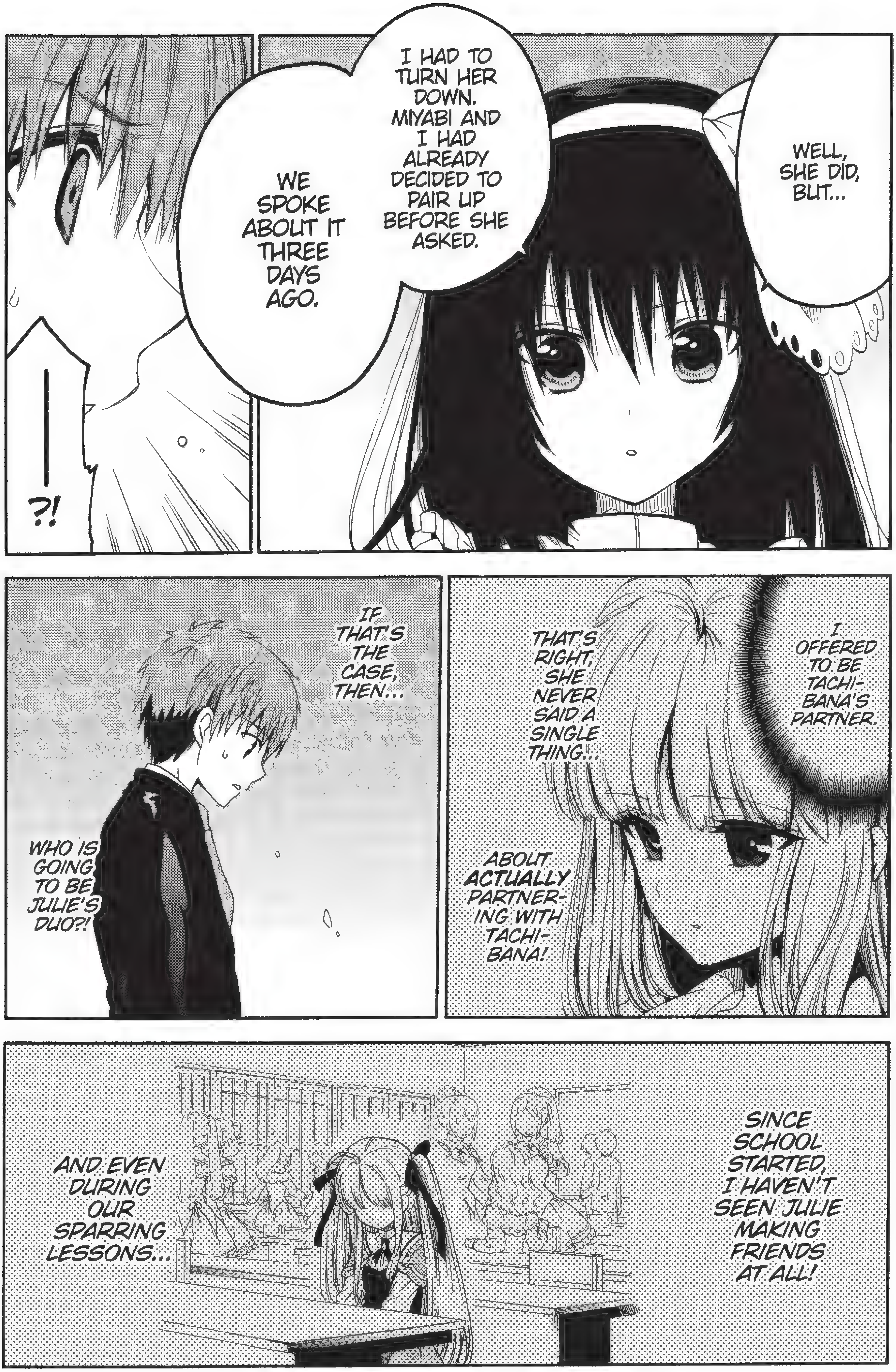

RUFFLE...
GOOONG
PAPA...
GOOONG

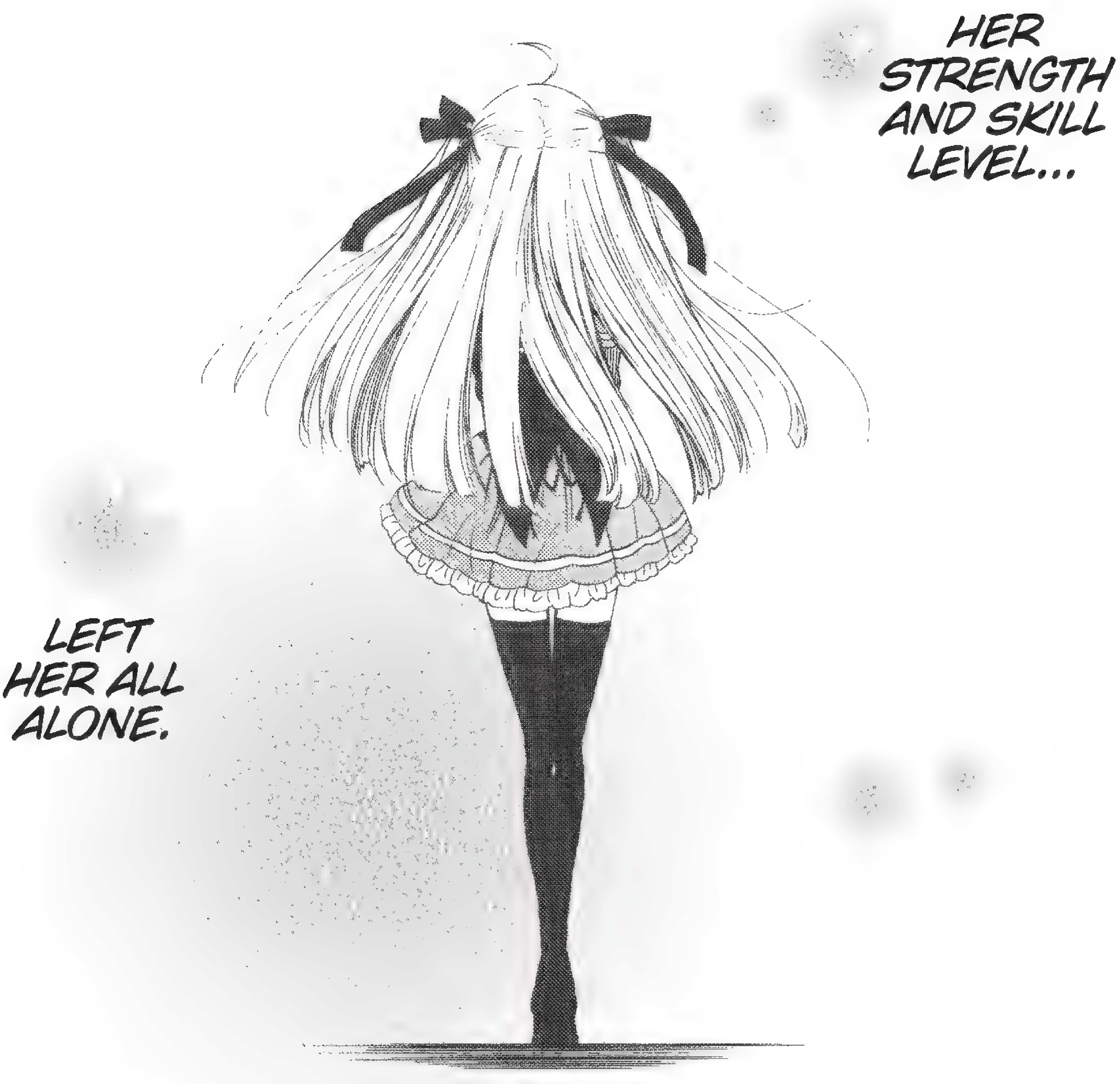
GOOONG
IT'S ALREADY THAT LATE?
WE SHOULD GET GOING, TORA.
CLOTTER...
HM? OH, YEAH...
BY THE WAY, TOR...
WHO IS THAT ROOMMATE OF YOURS PAIRING UP WITH?
SEEMS SHE'S PAIRING UP WITH TACHIBANA.
TACHIBANA AND JULIE? I WOULDN'T MIND WATCHING THOSE TWO GO AT IT.
YOU WOULD PUT IT THAT WAY.
SO-- JULIE'S SPEED WITH TACHIBANA'S POWER, RIGHT?
I HEARD THAT AFTER PARTNERS ARE DECIDED, THE DUOS WILL PARTICIPATE IN A MOCK BATTLE USING THEIR BLAZES.

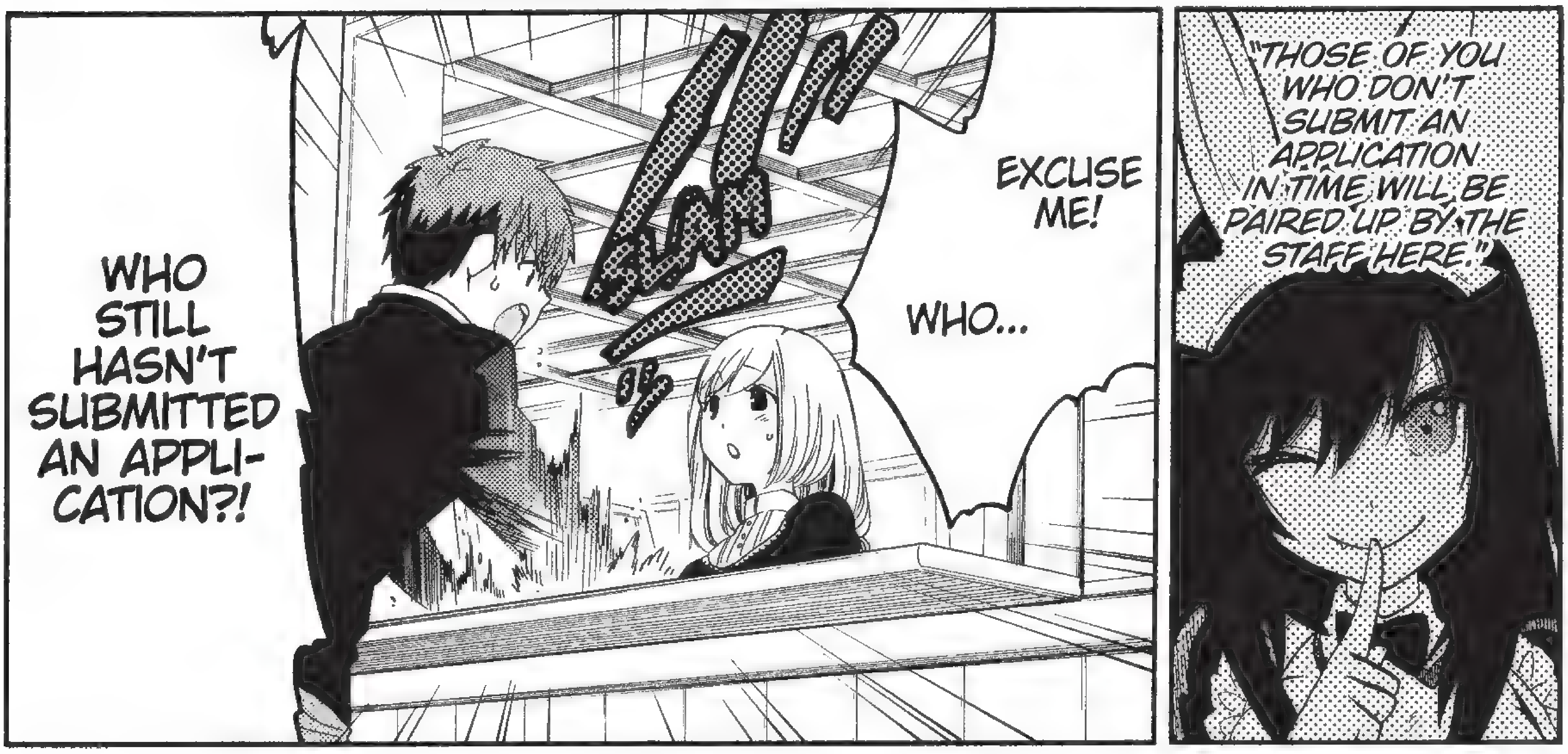
I WOULDN'T MIND **GRAPPLING** WITH THOSE TWO...
HMPH. NOW WHO'S BEING SUGGESTIVE? YOU'RE LOOKING **FORWARD** TO IT, *AREN'T* YOU?
I DIDN'T COME TO THIS SCHOOL TO **FIGHT** OFF THE LADIES... BUT...
FOR US, SINCE WE'VE STUDIED MARTIAL ARTS...
THE IDEA OF HAVING A CHANCE TO TEST OUR SKILLS IS THRILLING.
I MEAN, IT'S NATURAL THAT IT'D GET YOUR BLOOD PUMPING!
MAIN OFFICE
EXCUSE ME...
WE'RE HERE TO REGISTER AS A DUO.
OKAY! I JUST NEED YOUR STUDENT IDs.
STUDENT IDs?


WE PRINT YOUR PARTNER'S NAME ON YOUR STUDENT ID, TOO.
AFTER ALL, YOU TWO *ARE* GOING TO BE ROOMMATES FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS.
I SEE...
KOKONOE...
ARE YOU GUYS REGISTERING NOW, TOO?
TACHIBANA...
WE WANTED TO WAIT OUT THE CROWDS.
DID YOU TWO ALSO PUT OFF HANDING IN YOUR APPLICATION?
YEAH, THERE WAS A LINE EARLIER, SO...
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, JUL--
G-GOOD EVENING...
CLOP
コツ...


KOKO-NOE...
KUN.
H-HOTAKA?
WHAT'S WRONG? YOU LOOK SURPRISED.
W-WAIT A SECOND, TACHIBANA. IS YOUR DUO PARTNER...?
YES, IT'S MIYABI.
SHE STILL HAS SO MUCH TO LEARN, AND I JUST COULDN'T ABANDON HER.
I'M SORRY, TOMOE-CHAN. I PROMISE I'LL TRY MY BEST!
YOU DON'T NEED TO APOLOGIZE! WE *BOTH* NEED TO RELY ON EACH OTHER FROM NOW ON.
WA-WAIT A SEC! JULIE--?
DIDN'T JULIE OFFER TO BE YOUR PARTNER?!


WELL, SHE DID, BUT...
I HAD TO TURN HER DOWN. MIYABI AND I HAD ALREADY DECIDED TO PAIR UP BEFORE SHE ASKED.
WE SPOKE ABOUT IT THREE DAYS AGO.
—
?!
I OFFERED TO BE TACHIBANA'S PARTNER.
THAT'S RIGHT, SHE NEVER SAID A SINGLE THING...
ABOUT **ACTUALLY** PARTNERING WITH TACHIBANA!
IF THAT'S THE CASE, THEN...
WHO IS GOING TO BE JULIE'S DUO?!
SINCE SCHOOL STARTED, I HAVEN'T SEEN JULIE MAKING FRIENDS AT ALL!
AND EVEN DURING OUR SPARRING LESSONS...


HER STRENGTH AND SKILL LEVEL...
LEFT HER ALL ALONE.


"THOSE OF YOU WHO DON'T SUBMIT AN APPLICATION IN TIME WILL BE PAIRED UP BY THE STAFF HERE."
EXCUSE ME!
WHO...
WHO STILL HASN'T SUBMITTED AN APPLICATION?!

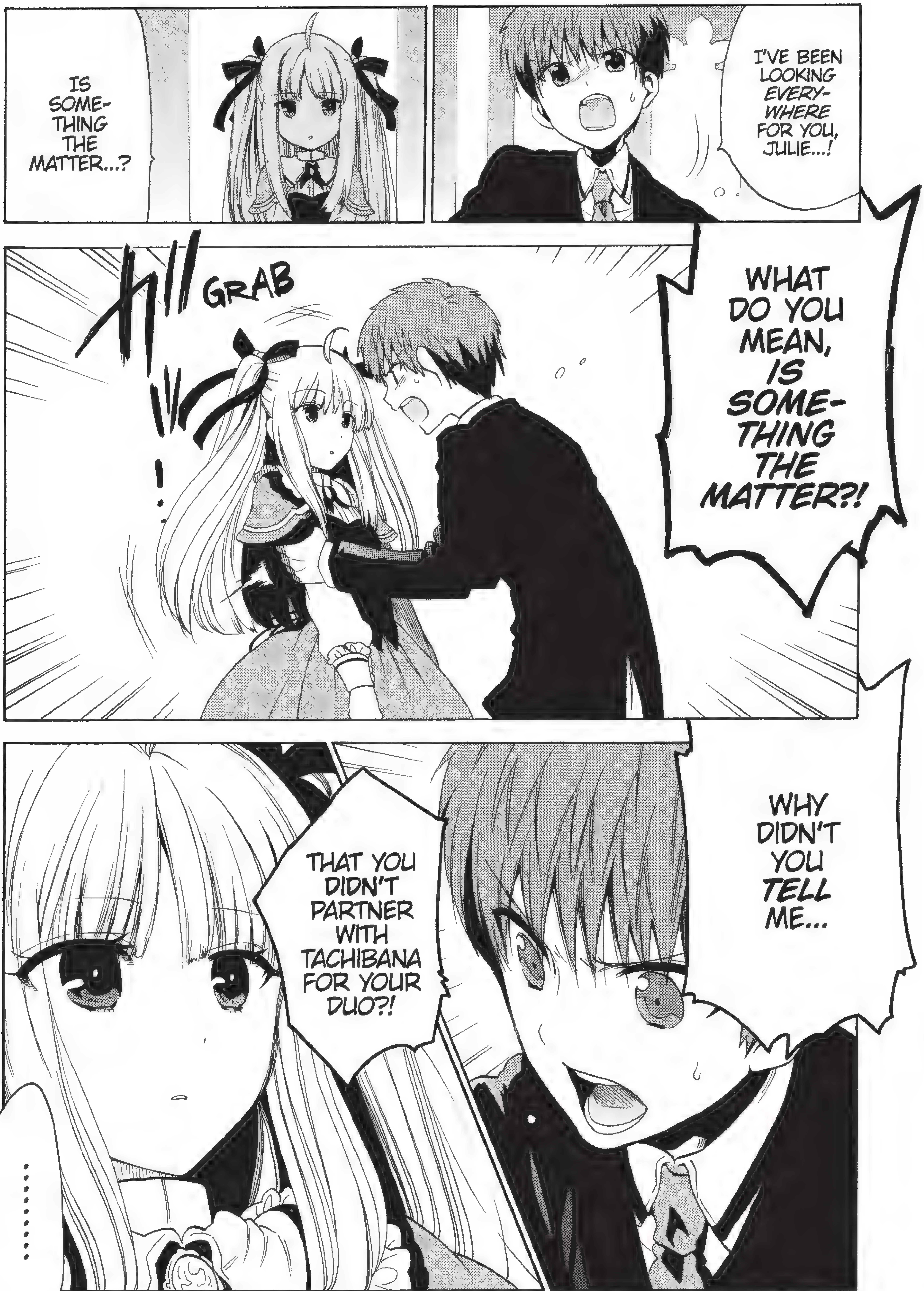
HMM... LET'S SEE...
THE FOUR OF YOU HERE...
AND BOTH OF YOUR ROOM-MATES.
JULIE...
AND TATSU...
WHO'S TATSU?
THE MEATHEAD I'M ROOMING WITH.
I DON'T THINK A DUO OF TWO STRANGERS FORCED TOGETHER WOULD LAST VERY LONG, BUT...
WHIRL...
スッ...
I'M GOING TO-- I'M GOING TO GO LOOK FOR JULIE!
TOR!
DART
THE APPLICATION DEADLINE IS SIX O'CLOCK!
PLEASE HURRY!

DASH
WHY...
WHY DIDN'T SHE TELL ME?!
IF SHE HAD JUST TALKED TO ME ABOUT IT...
NO.
IF I WERE IN HER POSITION...
I WOULDN'T SAY ANYTHING, EITHER. I DON'T THINK I'D BE ABLE SAY ANYTHING.
I COULDN'T MAKE ANOTHER PERSON WORRY ABOUT ME LIKE THAT.
BUT...
I WANTED HER TO TELL ME, PRECISELY BECAUSE IT'S ME...
AND I WANTED HER...
TO RELY ON ME.

CAN I REALLY JUST LEAVE HER...
TO SOMEONE ELSE?
JULIE...
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP

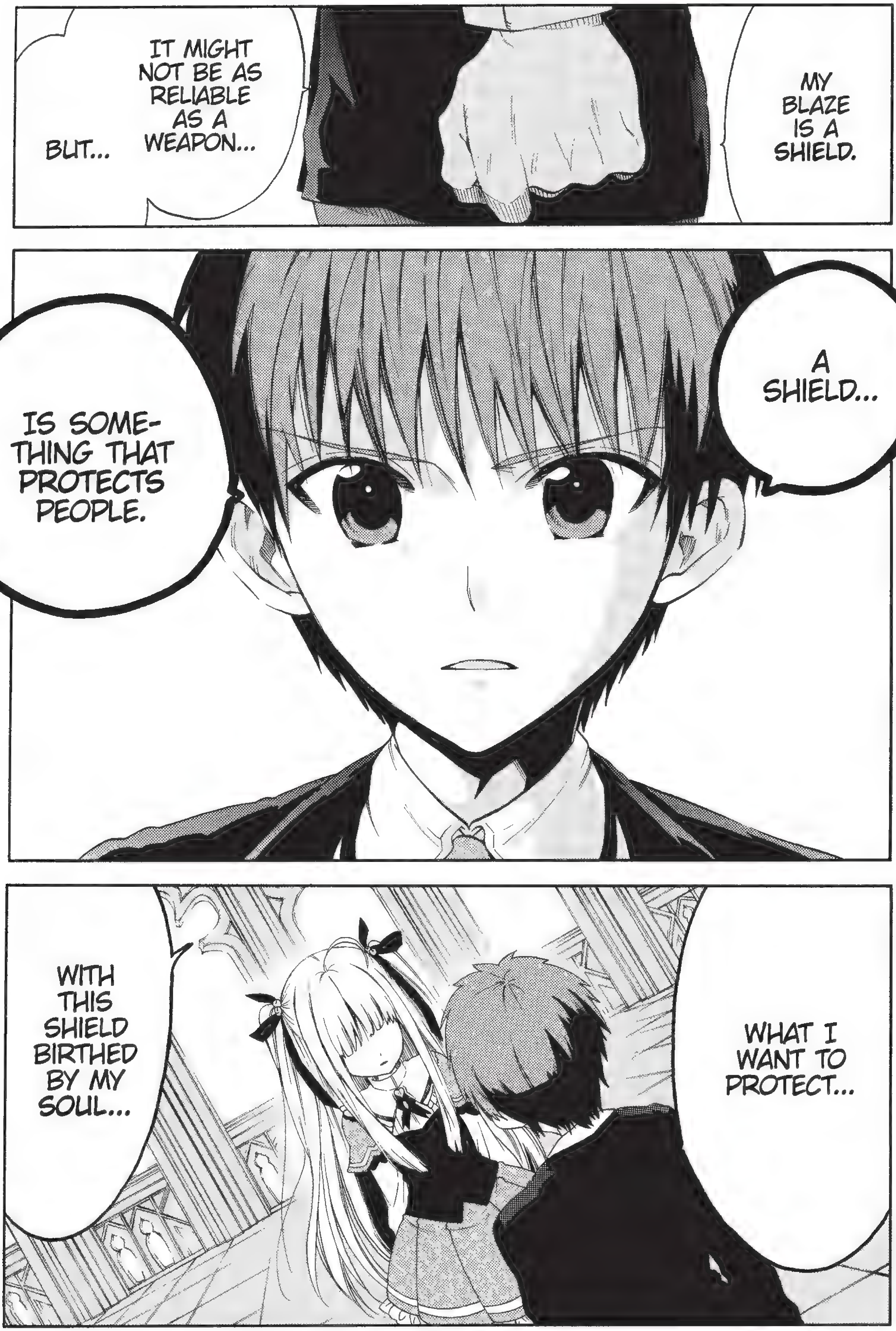
CLACK

I WILL...
TOR...
CHING
PROTECT JULIE.


I'VE BEEN LOOKING EVERYWHERE FOR YOU, JULIE...!
IS SOMETHING THE MATTER...?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, IS SOMETHING THE MATTER?!
GRAB
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME...
THAT YOU DIDN'T PARTNER WITH TACHIBANA FOR YOUR DUO?!
....

BECAUSE NOTHING WOULD CHANGE...
EVEN IF I *DID* TALK TO YOU ABOUT IT, SO...
I DIDN'T WANT TO...
TROUBLE YOU.
EVEN STILL...
I WANTED YOU TO TELL ME...
I WANTED YOU TO *RELY* ON ME...
I CAN'T BE SO SELFISH TO SOMEONE I'VE ONLY KNOWN A WEEK...
I'M SURE EVERYONE FEELS LIKE THAT. HOWEVER...
FROM NOW ON, I THINK IT WOULD BE GOOD IF...
WE LEARN TO UNDERSTAND AND TRUST EACH OTHER.
I...
I THOUGHT THAT IF I SPENT MORE TIME WITH YOU...
WE'D BE ABLE TO DEEPEN OUR RELATIONSHIP.

WHY ...?
HONESTLY... I ADMIRE YOUR STRENGTH.
I WAS ENVIOUS, THINKING THAT IF ONLY I HAD HAD A STRENGTH LIKE YOURS...
BUT THEN...
WHEN I SAW YOU IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT...
AND I WIPED AWAY THE TEARS YOU SHED IN YOUR SLEEP...
......!
I REALIZED...
I WANT TO PROTECT YOU.


MY BLAZE IS A SHIELD.
IT MIGHT NOT BE AS RELIABLE AS A WEAPON...
BUT...
A SHIELD...
IS SOMETHING THAT PROTECTS PEOPLE.
WHAT I WANT TO PROTECT...
WITH THIS SHIELD BIRTHED BY MY SOUL...

IS YOU...
JULIE.

TORA WILL BE FINE.
WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER A LONG TIME-- IF I TALK TO HIM, HE'LL UNDERSTAND.
HE WOULD NEVER FORGIVE ME...
FOR ABANDONING A GIRL, ANYWAY.
TOR...
TOR...
JULIE...

PLEASE BECOME MY DUO PARTNER!
……
JA.

AND WITH THAT...
WE'RE REGISTERED!
SHEESH. DON'T MAKE OTHER PEOPLE *WORRY* LIKE THAT.
SORRY, TORA...
IT'S FINE.
MORE THAN THAT, I'M RELIEVED THAT YOU'RE NOT THE TYPE OF PERSON TO ABANDON YOUR ROOMMATE.
See?
Nod Nod
Wha--?
What?!

IN *THAT* CASE, ONCE AGAIN.
AS MY OFFICIAL PARTNER...
I'LL BE COUNTING ON YOU...
Pat
Pat
JULIE.
JA.

OKAY THEN--SHOULD WE HEAD BACK?
BACK TO OUR ROOM?
JA.
OUR ROOM.
AND...
LET'S HAVE APPLE TEA AGAIN.

ABSOLUTE DUO

VOLUME 1

SHINICHIROU NARIIE PRESENTS

ORIGINAL STORY & ILLUSTRATION
HIIRAGIBOSHI TAKUMI
& ASABA YOU

<<< [—— to be continued.]

DA-DAN
HOIST
YOU'RE TELLING ME HE DIDN'T LAY A HAND ON HER IN A SITUATION LIKE THAT?!
IN THE FIRST PLACE, THAT'S A VIOLATION OF SCHOOL RULES.
Please don't say such suspicious things...
R-RIGHT... BUT, IGNORING THAT...
COULD THAT MEAN, PERHAPS, THAT...
?
IRREGULAR-KUN...
Tora...
cut it out...
PREFERS MEN?!
DU-DUUUN!
IN ORDER TO FIND OUT...
STARE
THEY'RE HEAVY...
BOING...
※ Padding
HERE'S YOUR APPLE TEA.
THANK YOU.
THANKS AGAIN FOR ALL YOUR HELP TODAY, JULIE.

Oh, Shimura Zoo is on.
A white tiger... So cute!
HA HA HA! SO OWLS CAN GET THAT SKINNY, HUH?
BWAM
SAY SOMETHING ABOUT HER CHEST, ALREADY!
SENSEI?!
DO YOU THINK JUST BECAUSE GIRLS MATURE FASTER THAN BOYS SHE COULD SUDDENLY BECOME AN E CUP OVERNIGHT?!
YOU NOTICED, RIGHT?! SAY SOMETHING!
BOUNCE
UH... WELL...
ACTUALLY...
Ahem!
コホンッ
I THINK THAT THE NORMAL JULIE...
IS BEST...
Ja!
YOOOINK
SO THAT'S IT. YOU AREN'T GAY.
YOU'RE JUST A COWARD WHO LIKES FLAT-CHESTED GIRLS, HUH?!
I see, I see.
WH-WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

SHINICHIROU NARIIE
PRESENTS

ABSOLUTE DUO

ABSOLUTE
DUO
SHINICHIROU NARIIE PRESENTS
ORIGINAL STORY & ILLUSTRATION
HIIRAGIBOSHI TAKUMI
& ASABA YOU

I’m so excited about this book’s release! Under Nariie-sensei’s hands, Imari is just darling! I feel like I’ll die in indignation. She’s so unbelievably adorable that I feel nothing but regret for having her leave the story so abruptly! I guess I’ll have to create an alternate universe story where she doesn’t get expelled, huh? Anyway, the cuteness of the heroines is obvious, and the powerful, moving battle scenes are also extremely cool. I’m also looking forward to seeing the small details of each volume. I use it as a way to study for my own creations. I won’t let myself fall behind, and I’ll work to make more and more interesting stories, too! (`*ω*’)

2013.11 TAKUMI HIIRAGIBOSHI

Congratulations on the release of volume 1! The *Absolute Duo* that Nariie-sensei has drawn is stylish, cute, and passionate! As such, I am really looking forward to each release. The Mikuni-sensei character that Nariie-sensei designed is so suave! Please make sure he shows up more--I’m counting on you, Hiiragiboshi-san!

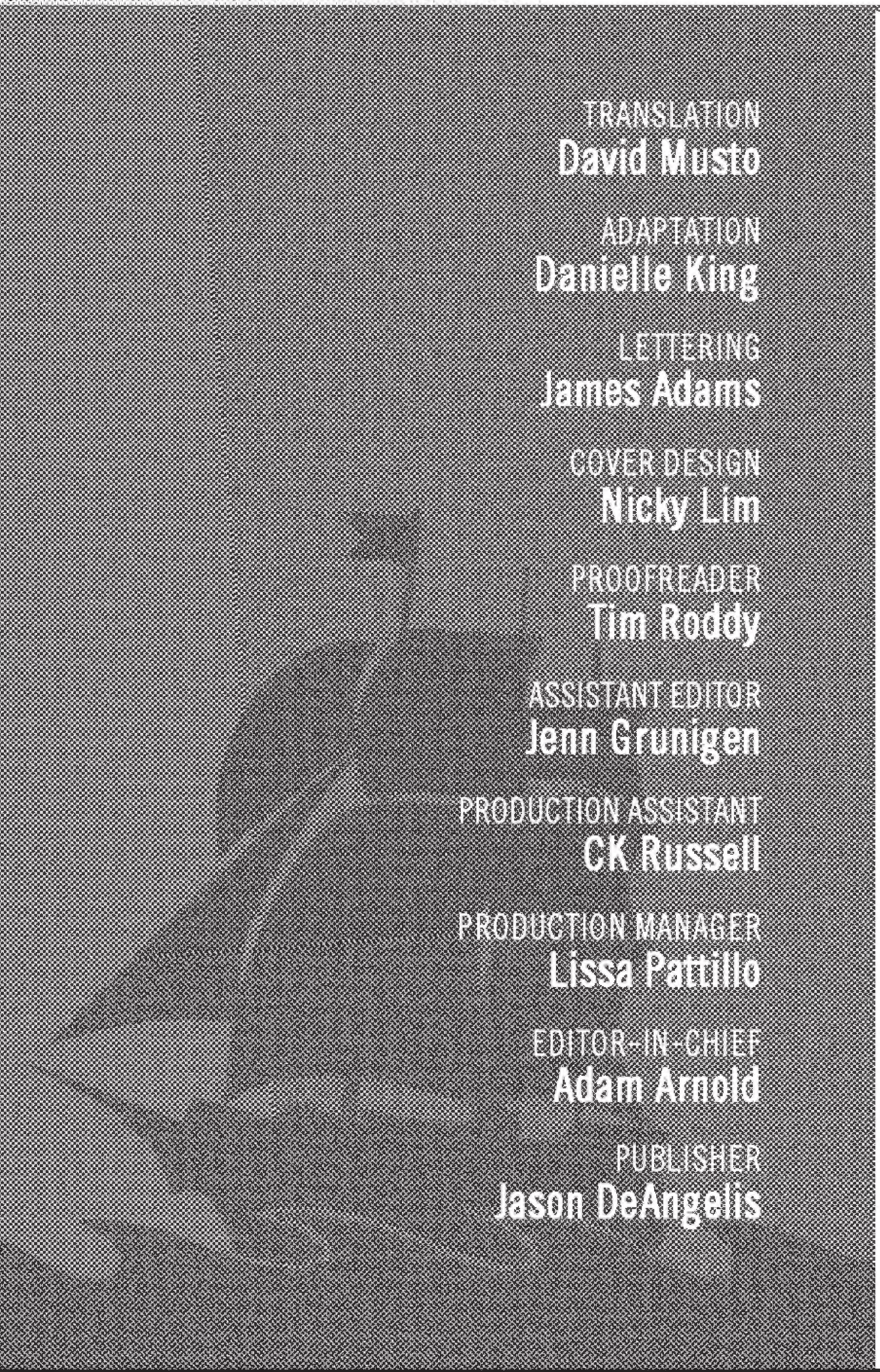
YOU ASABA

SEVEN SEAS ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS

SHINICHIROU NARIIE PRESENTS

ABSOLUTE DUO
アブソリュート・デュオ

original story **TAKUMI HIIRAGIBOSHI** character design **YOU ASABA** **VOLUME 1**



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ABSOLUTE DUO VOL. 1

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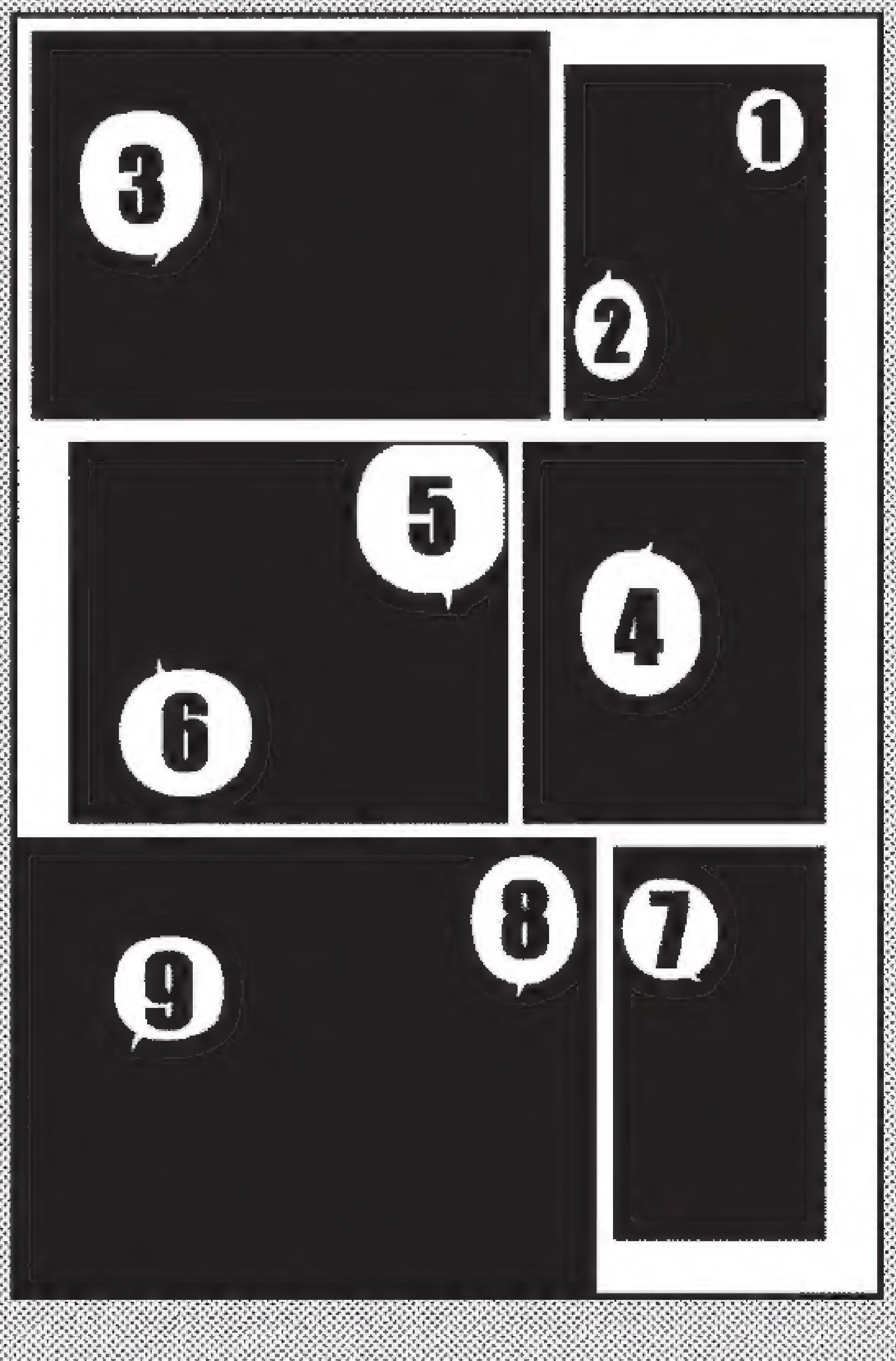
READING DIRECTIONS

This book reads from ***right to left***, Japanese style. If this is your first time reading manga, you start reading from the top right panel on each page and take it from there. If you get lost, just follow the numbered diagram here. It may seem backwards at first, but you'll get the hang of it! Have fun!!



BLAZING SHIELD

At Koryo Academy, students battle with weapons forged from their souls. Kokonoe Tor, however, is an Irregular. He doesn't have a weapon–he has a shield! To gain the strength he seeks–and thus unravel the truth of his tragic past–he must form a Duo with another student. But first, he has to figure out how to share a room with a girl, the graceful fighter Julie Sigtuna, and not die of *total* awkwardness.

Watch the anime from Funimation!

Rated: TEEN

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